MAN, MYTH & MAGIC

The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion and the Unknown

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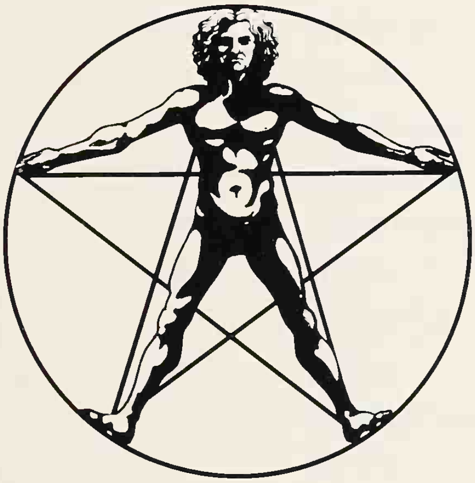

The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion and the Unknown

Editor-in-Chief
Richard Cavendish

Editorial Board
C. A. Burland; Professor Glyn Daniel;
Professor E. R. Dodds; Professor Mircea Eliade;
William Sargant; John Symonds;
Professor R. J. Zwi Werblowsky;
Professor R. C. Zaehner.

New Edition edited and compiled by
Richard Cavendish and Brian Innes

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Frontispiece: Nuba wrestlers cover themselves with ashes, believing that the ashes, like the fire which created them, can give them new life and strength. (Leni Riefenstahl)

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EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Richard Cavendish is a leading authority on the history of ideas, whose books have been acclaimed for their combination of clarity and insight on both sides of the Atlantic. He is author of *The Black Arts*, a study of the European tradition of magic; *The Powers of Evil*; *The Tarot*; *A History of Magic*; *Visions of Heaven and Hell*; *King Arthur and the Grail*; and *The Great Religions*, a study of the major religions in the world and their central beliefs. He is also the Editor of *The Encyclopedia of the Unexplained*; *Mythology – an Illustrated Encyclopedia*; and the *Encyclopedia of Legends*.

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

C.A. Burland joined the staff of the Department of Ethnography at the British Museum in 1925 and retired in 1965. A specialist in the arts and religions of primitive peoples, he conveyed his enthusiasm for these subjects to a wide audience in many excellent books. These include *The Magical Arts*; *The Ancient Maya*; *The Aztecs*; *Man and Art*; *The Arts of the Alchemists*; *The Magic Books of Peru*; *Peru under the Incas*; *Montezuma*; and *Peoples of the Sun*.

Glyn Daniel, a Welshman and leading archaeologist, was editor of *Antiquity* and the Thames and Hudson *Ancient Peoples and Places* series, and appeared frequently on television. An expert on megalithic tombs and monuments, prehistoric art and the history of archaeology, his numerous books include: *The Idea of Prehistory*; *The Megalith Builders of Western Europe*; *The Origins and Growth of Archaeology*; *Megaliths in History*; and *A Hundred and Fifty Years of Archaeology*. He was a Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge, and Disney Professor of Archaeology at Cambridge 1974-1981.

E. R. Dodds was Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford from 1936-1960. An exceptionally distinguished classical scholar, he was probably best known for his brilliant books *The Greeks and the Irrational* and *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*. Professor Dodds listed psychical research as his recreation in *Who's Who*, and was President of the Society for Psychical Research, The Classical Association and The Hellenic Society.

Mircea Eliade was Professor of the History of Religions at the University of Chicago, and widely regarded as the world's greatest authority on comparative mythology and religion. A Rumanian, educated at Bucharest University, he taught at the Sorbonne from 1945, and moved to Chicago in 1956. He has over 30 titles listed in *Books in Print*. These include *The Myth of the Eternal Return*; *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*; *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*; *Shamanism*; *History and Meaning in Religion*; *A History of Religious Ideas*; and *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth*.

William Sargant, a formidable and controversial figure in the field of psychiatry, was Physician in Charge of the Department of Psychological Medicine at St Thomas' Hospital, London, for many years, and was well known for pioneering physical methods of treatment in psychiatry, stemming from his wartime work on the treatment of battle neurosis. His book *The Battle for the Mind* is still a leading work on brainwashing and conversion. Another well-known title is *The Mind Possessed* (on possession and trance states). He discussed his experiences in his autobiography, *The Unquiet Mind*.

EDUCATIONAL BOARD CONSULTANTS

John Symonds, the author of the definitive biography of Aleister Crowley, *The Great Beast*, was also Crowley's literary executor, edited his autobiography, and was co-editor (with Kenneth Grant) of Crowley's *Confessions*, and *Magic*. His other books include *Madame Blavatsky: Medium and Magician*.

R.J.Zwi Werblowsky was Professor of Comparative Religion and the History of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He studied in Switzerland and taught in England before joining the Hebrew University in 1956, and wrote numerous books and articles on comparative religion, the Cabala, and Jewish mysticism.

R.C.Zaehner was Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions at Oxford, and a distinguished scholar. A Roman Catholic, he was an authority on Oriental religions and mysticism. He was a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford. His books include *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*; *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*; *Hinduism*; *The Catholic Church and World Religions*; and, as editor, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths*.

EXECUTIVE EDITOR, 1995 Edition

Brian Innes was art director of the original edition of *Man, Myth & Magic*. Since then he has been editorial director of *The Unexplained*, and written a succession of books on esoteric subjects, including *Horoscopes*, *The Tarot* and (as Neil Powell) *Alchemy the Ancient Science* and *The Book of Change*.

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTORS to the 1995 Edition

Dr Paul Bahn is an archeologist and author of *Images of the Ice Age*, *Archeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* (with Colin Renfrew) and *Easter Island, Earth Island* (with J. Flenley).

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Dr Jeremy MacClancy is Research Associate in the Institute of Social Anthropology, Oxford University. He is the author of *To Kill a Bird with Two Stones: a History of Vanuatu*, and *Consuming Culture*.

Lynn Picknett is a consultant to London Capital Radio on occult matters and editor of *The Encyclopedia of the Paranormal*.

Robert Rickard is founder and co-editor of *Fortean Times*. His books include *Phenomena* and *Living Wonders* (both with John Michell).

Stephen Skinner is a writer on esoteric subjects, whose books include *Feng Shui*, *The Oracle of Geomancy;* and (with Francis King) *Nostradamus* and *Techniques of High Magic*.

Dr Caroline Watt is postdoctoral Research Fellow with the Koestler Chair of Parapsychology at Edinburgh University.

SPECIAL CONSULTANTS to the 1st Edition

Rev.S.G.F.Brandon was Professor of Comparative Religion and Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Manchester University. The author of numerous books, he also edited the *Dictionary of Comparative Religion*.

Katharine Briggs was President of the British Folklore Society and a leading authority on folklore subjects. She published numerous books, the most monumental being her *Dictionary of British Folk Tales*.

William Gaunt, painter, art historian and art critic, was author of many books on art subjects. These include *The PreRaphaelite Tragedy*; *The Aesthetic Adventure*; *The March of the Moderns*; and *Arrows of Desire*.

Douglas Hill was co-author of *The Supernatural* and author of *Magic and Superstition*.

Francis Huxley, British anthropologist, was well known for his books *The Invisibles* (a study of voodoo); *The Way of the Sacred*; and *The Raven and the Writing Desk*.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Editing *Man, Myth and Magic* was an arduous but rewarding experience. It entailed planning and finding expert international contributors for articles from the Aberdeen Witches and the Abominable Snowman to Zoroastrianism and the Zulus – with half of human experience in between. Any project on so massive a scale demands hard work. The reward was the treasure of fascinating information and revealing insights which the articles bring together, in fields as far-ranging as comparative religion, history, anthropology, sociology, art and symbolism.

The encyclopedia covers a gigantic range of speculation, belief and behaviour, ranging in scale from the major religions of the world – Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam – with all that they have brought to human life, down to everyday common superstitions, such as touching wood or throwing spilled salt over one's shoulder. It deals with traditional rituals and ideas across the world, from the peyote cults of American Indians to the sacred dreamtime of the Australian Aborigines and the cargo cults of the southern Pacific.

Man, Myth and Magic extends in time from the roots of religion, mythology and magic in prehistoric ages to the new religious movements of our own century; from Stonehenge to modern Africa and Japan; from the ancient themes of the seasons, fertility, death and new life to the modern interest in ways of expanding consciousness and exploring inner space. It has heroes from King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table to Samson, Sinbad and Robin Hood, quests from the Golden Fleece to the Grail, legendary monsters from unicorns to giants. It deals with myths from the creation of the world to the great flood and the eventual destruction of the universe, and with the constellations of belief and custom which have grown up around life's major crisis points, from birth through initiation and marriage to death. It explores magic and witchcraft, astrology and the Tarot, the lore of animals and plants.

What made it possible to create an encyclopedia of this kind was the fact that the last hundred years have seen a powerful revival of interest in these subjects at both the scholarly and the popular levels. The revival of scholarly interest has created the modern study of comparative religion; modern anthropology with its investigation of so-called 'primitive' or 'simpler' peoples and their beliefs and rituals (which are often neither primitive nor simple); the attempt to explore the hidden powers of the mind and to test objectively such phenomena as telepathy, poltergeists and ghosts; and the application of modern psychology to beliefs about the supernatural and the patterns and symbols in which these beliefs take shape. At the same time there has been a flourishing revival of popular interest in oriental religions and mysticism, in mythology, magic and alternative paths to truth.

This interest has shown no sign of diminishing in the years since the encyclopedia was first put together. On the contrary, it has grown stronger and has explored new pathways. At the same time scholarly investigation of our subjects has continued and has thrown much new light on some of our topics. The present revision of *Man, Myth and Magic* takes account of both these developments. Articles have been updated to cover fresh discoveries and new theories since they first appeared. Where an article has been revised other than by the original author, you will find an asterisk (*) after his or her name in this edition.

The bibliographies have also been updated to take account of the considerable number of books on our subject which have been published in the last 20 years. We have also added new articles on topics which have come into greater prominence since the encyclopedia was originally created. They range from Ley Lines, Alien Visitors and New Age theories about prehistoric stone circles and standing stones to matters as far apart as near-death experiences, hypnotic regression, morphic resonance and urban legends – the stories that go the rounds about vanishing hitchhikers, alligators in the city sewers and so on. Among these new entries is a range of articles on the alternative therapies – and the theories behind them – which have waxed and blossomed in recent years.

With all this, *Man, Myth and Magic* is not intended to convert you, to or from any belief or set of beliefs and attitudes. The purpose of the articles is not to persuade or justify, but to describe what people have believed and trace the consequences of those beliefs in action. The editorial attitude is one of sympathetic neutrality. It is for the reader to decide where truth and value may lie. I hope that there is as much interest, pleasure and satisfaction in reading these pages as all those involved took in creating them.

Richard Cavendish
London 1995

A READER'S GUIDE

Man, Myth and Magic, the Illustrated Encyclopedia of Religion, Mythology and the Unknown, is presented here in a newly revised and updated edition. It is a fully comprehensive guide to the world's religions, mythologies and magical belief systems, from the distant past to the present day. The encyclopedia is a twenty-volume work with a truly impressive range, and includes all the major (and many of the minor) faiths, philosophies, legends, mythologies and folklore, as well as literature, symbolism, superstition and the supernatural. *Man, Myth and Magic* not only provides an excellent historical perspective, but also looks forward to the future, with discussions of how such subjects as UFOs, alien visitors, parapsychology and psychic abilities are the subjects of ongoing research projects all over the world.

Objectives

The guiding principle of *Man, Myth and Magic* is the stance of unbiased exploration. It shows the myriad ways in which different cultures have questioned and explained the mysterious nature of the world about them, and will lead teachers and students towards a broader understanding of their own and other people's beliefs and customs.

Text

Within the encyclopedia, editorial control has ensured that the following major areas are fully covered:

WORLD RELIGIONS: Major world religions are examined in depth: Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, their origins and development.

CULTS, SECTS, MYSTERY RELIGIONS: Much of religious and supernatural belief is practised outside the mainstream of major religion. Among the many subjects included are Black Muslims, Cathars, Communistic religious movements, Dervishes, Druids, Gnostics, new Japanese cults, Jehovah's Witnesses, Messianic movements, Pentecostalists, Shakers, Sufis and Theosophists.

ANCIENT CULTURES AND RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS: The Babylonians, Celts, Etruscans, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Phoenicians, Incas, Aztecs, Polynesians, Mexicans and Germanic peoples are among the many cultures described, each with their unique systems of religion, mythology and magic.

MAGICAL BELIEFS: The history of magic from prehistoric times to the present is fully explored in such themes as alchemy, gematria, hunting magic, imitative, sympathetic and love magic, the theory of correspondences, ritual magic, talismans, black and white magic. A range of 'New Age' beliefs and practices developed from these ancient beliefs is also considered.

WITCHCRAFT: Individuals and organized groups of people have practised magic all over the world – and continue to do so today. As well as describing witchcraft in Britain, Europe, North America and Africa, entries include information on witch persecution, and subjects connected with witchcraft, such as familiars, flying ointment, broomsticks and spells.

MYTHS: Myths deal with the creation of the world, with the origin of good and evil, and the journey of the soul. They feature gods and goddesses, and appear in a wide range of cultures and countries. Myths from Greece, Egypt, Rome, Scandinavia, the Americas and the Orient are all described, as well as the rites and customs associated with the deities.

LEGENDS, FABLES AND FAIRY TALES: Handed down by word of mouth, these are stories of heroes, quests, places, animals and people derived from the earliest experiences of mankind. They have a timeless quality, whether they are taken from the *Arabian Nights* or the brothers Grimm. Entries include the stories of Achilles, Jason, Arthur and his knights, Merlin, the Grail legends, Hercules, Morgan le Fay, Brer Rabbit and many others; and there are entries on their survival in a modern form in many parts of the world.

FORTUNE TELLING AND DIVINATION: In a world where the future is precarious and nature full of mystery and power, human beings have devised fascinating ways of looking into the past and future. Articles discuss dreams, astrology, fate, geomancy, I Ching, numerology, omens, oracles, palmistry, scrying the Tarot – all ways of trying to determine, and if possible control, our destiny.

PSYCHIC RESEARCH: Exploration of unknown phenomena continues today in many countries into dreams, automatic art and writing, clairvoyance, ESP, faith healing, trance and psychokinesis.

ART, DRAMA AND POETRY: The urge to symbolize belief in forms such as painting, sculpture, music, dance and drama has resulted in a rich variety of creative achievement, including mystery and folk plays, children's games, nursery rhymes, Morris dances, science fiction and films; articles also cover such mystical artists as Blake, Bosch, Redon, Wagner, together with the many forms of symbolism.

Arrangement

The subjects are arranged alphabetically, and the depth of coverage varies from major articles of up to 10,000 words to concise, glossary-type definitive entries in short paragraphs. The work is fully cross-referenced, and subjects of major interest are provided with individual bibliographies of further reading on the subject.

Classified subject guides

In order to direct teachers and students towards the main subject areas of *Man, Myth and Magic*, a series of special classified thematic subject guides has been created, together with recommended sources of further reading to extend their range even further; the relevant entries in the encyclopedia are conveniently arranged and classified under major titles. These include topics such as The Secret Lore of Magic; Witchcraft; Plants and Animals in Mythology; Prediction; Myths of Many Lands; The Hero's Quest. Ideas on how these can be used in teaching and studying are discussed below.

Index

The A-Z index provides immediate access to any specific item sought by the reader. The reference distinguishes the nature of the entry in terms of a main entry, supplementary subject entries and illustrations. Also indicated is the volume reference. Following this comes a series of topical indexes to assist in the pursuit of a particular topic of interest.

Illustrations

Since much of what we know about myth, folklore and religion has been passed down over the centuries by word of mouth, and recorded only comparatively recently, visual images are often the most powerful and vivid links we have with the past. The wealth of illustration in *Man, Myth and Magic* is invaluable, not only because of the diversity of sources, but also because of the superb quality of colour reproduction, making the set a pleasure to consult.

Belief is reflected in every product of human imagination, whether in the hunting magic of the cave paintings at Lascaux or a frieze depicting Demeter and Persephone in the story of the seasons. Gods and goddesses, heroes and demons, birth, initiation and death are all recorded here in infinite variety.

The work of more modern artists such as Dali, Ernst and Blake is featured, as well as the rich heritage of designs from illuminated manuscripts, tomb and wall paintings, and artifacts in metal, pottery and wood. Architecture is well-represented too, with examples of religious building from all over the world.

Skill development for students

Man, Myth and Magic can be consulted as the basic text for a subject or as a source of enrichment for students. It can act as a reference for a simple reading or writing assignment, or as the inspiration for a major research or term paper.

Scope

As well as being a major asset to social studies teaching, the encyclopedia will provide students from a wide range of disciplines with a stimulating, accessible and beautifully illustrated reference work.

Man, Myth and Magic lends itself very easily to a multi-disciplinary approach to study. For example, literature students will be interested in myths and legends, fairy tales and folk plays, riddles and nursery rhymes. Math students will be fascinated to read about numerology and pyramidology, while students of art, sculpture, carving, pottery and other crafts will find the marvellous illustrations and special articles on the subjects particularly helpful.

Even students of physics, chemistry and biology sciences will find interesting background reading in such topics as alchemy, astronomy, parapsychology and plant and animal lore. Recent research by psychologists has investigated areas such as astrology – often with surprising results. Students of psychology will be interested to discuss the findings of Michel Gauquelin and Hans Eysenck in their examination of planetary positions on standard personality types. The attitude of Freud and Jung to religion and the supernatural is also discussed.

As well as its relevance to study areas already mentioned, the encyclopedia will provide strong background reference in history, anthropology, philosophy and comparative religion.

Conceptual themes

As the student becomes involved in the encyclopedia, he or she will gradually become sensitive to the major concepts emerging from research. This is where the study guides can be most useful, for they can direct the student towards major themes, patterns and motifs underlying much of the world's belief systems. For example, the concept of imitative magic that inspired the earliest hunters to depict animals on cave walls is still used in modern witchcraft groups in various forms.

The trickster figure appears in folklore tales all over the world, another concept worth exploring. What concepts have different cultures used to explain creation? The progress of the seasons; the rising and setting of the sun? All these areas are challenging ways for more advanced students to use the encyclopedia.

Man, Myth and Magic offers an opportunity for students that is extremely valuable; twenty volumes that are both multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary; a wealth of fine illustrations; a research source well-suited to a variety of age levels that will provoke interest and encourage speculation in both teachers and students.

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTORS

Joan Aiken: author of thrillers and books for children

Violet Alford: authority on folklore and folk dance; books include *Sword Dance and Drama; The Traditional Dance* (with Rodney Gallop)

D. B. Alsford: Curator of Collections to the Ethnology Division of the National Museum of Man, Ottawa

R. Ambelain: author of numerous books in French on occultism and the Cabala

W. J. Argyle: social anthropologist, Queen Mary College, London; author of *The Fon of Dahomey*

A. H. Armstrong: Gladstone Professor of Greek, Liverpool; edited the *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy;* author of *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy; Plotinus,* etc.

Rev. E. A. Armstrong: authority on the folklore of birds and animals; formerly Vicar of St Mark's Cambridge; author of *The Folklore of Birds; The Wren; Bird Display and Behaviour,* etc.

Geoffrey Ashe: author of *King Arthur's Avalon; From Caesar to Arthur; Land to the West; The Land and the Book; Gandhi: a Study in Revolution; Camelot and the Vision of Albion,* etc.

Peter Avery: Fellow of King's College and Lecturer in Oriental Studies, Cambridge University

Edward Bacon: author of *Digging for History; Atlantis* (with A. G. Galanopoulos); editor of the 'Life in Ancient Lands' series

Wanda von Baeyer-Katte: Department of Psychology, University of Heidelberg

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Robert Baldick: Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford; co-editor, Penguin Classics series; books include *Life of J. K. Huysmans*

Roger Bannister: athlete and author

Richard Barber: author of *Arthur of Albion; Henry Plantagenet; The Knight and Chivalry;* co-author of a dictionary of fabulous beasts

J. C. Baroja: Spanish author of *The World of Witches*

M. R. Barrington: member of the Council of the Society for Psychical Research

P. T. W. Baxter: social anthropologist, Manchester University; co-author of *The Azande and Related Peoples*

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Hans Biedermann: author of a German language encyclopedia of magic

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K. M. Briggs (the late): former President of the Folklore Society; author of *The Anatomy of Puck; Pale Hecate's Team; The Fairies in Tradition and Literature; Dictionary of British Folk-Tales,* etc.; special consultant to *Man, Myth and Magic*

C. D. Broad: formerly Knightsbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy, Cambridge; former President of the Society for Psychical Research; author of *Five Types of Ethical Theory; Psychical Research, Religion and Philosophy; Lectures on Psychical Research,* etc.

Ivor Brown: critic and editor; books include *A Ring of Words; Dr Johnson and His World; Bernard Shaw in His Time; Shakespeare and His World*

F. F. Bruce: Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis, Manchester; books include *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*

C. A. Burland: formerly of the Department of Ethnography, British Museum; books include *The Magical Arts; The Ancient Maya; The Aztecs; Man and Art; The Arts of the Alchemists;* member of the Editorial Board of *Man, Myth and Magic*

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Christopher Busby: translator, author.

Richard Cavendish: editor of *Man, Myth and Magic;* author of *The Black Arts*

Rev. Henry Chadwick: Dean of Christ Church and Regius Professor of Divinity, Oxford; books include *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition; The Early Church*

Maryse Choisy: editor-in-chief of *Encyclopédie de l'Homme Religieux;* author of *La Métaphysique des Yogas,* etc.

Norman Cohn: Director of the Centre for Research into Collective Psychopathology, Sussex University; author of *The Pursuit of the Millennium*

Jack Conrad: Professor of Anthropology, Southwestern University, Memphis; author of *The Horn and the Sword; Museum of Man,* etc.

Rev. T. Corbishley, S.J.: former Master of Campion Hall, Oxford, and Superior of the Farm St Church; books include *Roman Catholicism; The Contemporary Christian; Religion is Reasonable*

Nona Coxhead: author and editor

B. A. L. Cranstone: Deputy Keeper, Dept of Ethnography, British Museum

Rev. J. H. Crehan, S.J.: contributor to the *Dictionary of Catholic Theology;* edited works by the late Father Thurston, including *Physical Phenomena of Mysticism*

W. B. Crow: biologist; author of *Mysteries of the Ancients; A History of Magic, Witchcraft and Occultism,* etc.

Glyn Daniel: Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge; editor of *Antiquity;* editor of the 'Ancient Peoples and Places' series; books include *The Idea of Prehistory; Man Discovers His Past; The Origins and Growth of Archaeology; The First Civilisations;* member of the Editorial Board of *Man, Myth and Magic*

H. R. Ellis Davidson: Gulbenkian Research Fellow, Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge; author of *Pagan Scandinavia; The Gods and Myths of Northern Europe; The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England; Scandinavian Mythology,* etc.

Richard Deacon: author of *Madoc and the Discovery of America; John Dee,* etc.

Raymond De Becker: author of *The Meaning of Dreams*

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E. R. Dodds (the late): formerly Regius Professor of Greek, Oxford; past President of the Society for Psychical Research; books include *The Greeks and the Irrational; Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety;* editions of the *Bacchae* of Euripides, the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus; member of the Editorial Board of *Man, Myth and Magic*

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The major thematic areas of the encyclopedia can be explored by following the classified subject guides. In addition, an excellent range of books for further reading is provided for in-depth study.

1. MAGIC: THE SECRET LORE

'The question of magic is a question of discovering and employing hitherto unknown forces in Nature.'

It is impossible to know precisely when human beings first tried to harness these forces. From imitative hunting magic onwards, a whole tradition of magic rituals has developed, with its appendages of gestures and symbols, circles and pentagrams, chants and spells. This secret lore can be found in grimoires or spell books, and in the theories of the Occultists and Cabalists.

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Weather Magic

2. ALCHEMY

The magical mystical doctrines of the alchemists, under the name of Hermes Trismegisthus, became known as hermetic philosophy or art. Fire and crucible, arcane rituals, the search for the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life, led to the early beginnings of chemistry. The Alchemists' attempts to transmute base metals into gold were bound up with their desire to perfect the soul and a belief that all the varied phenomena of the world are parts of one harmonious whole and permeated by universal spirit. *See also* 5: Foretelling the Future, Astrology.

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3. WITCHES AND WITCHCRAFT

Although we often think of witches as female, in fact many cultures have male witches. As people who claim to manipulate the natural world for good or evil, witches have traditionally carried great authority as seers and wise advisers to people with problems. Witches have inspired not only respect but fear, and this led to such appalling reactions as the witch hunts in Europe and America, in which thousands of witches were put to death. Witchcraft continues to thrive in many cultures around the world – in recent years there has been a remarkable revival in Europe and America.

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Salem Witches
Satanism
Shape-shifting
Sin-eater
Somerset Witches
Sorcery
Swedish Witchcraft
Voodoo
Weather Magic
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4. DEVILS, DEMONS AND ANGELS

Good and evil, personified as God and the Devil in various forms, are found in many cultures. A divided universe implies conflict: an interminable war between the powers of light and darkness, the spirits of Heaven and Hell. Apocalyptic visions of Doomsday and the idea of judgement reflect a common wish to see the good rewarded and the wicked punished, to right the balance most often found in this world. Whether Heaven and Hell are seen as places or as states of mind, the divided world can be seen as a mirror of the conflict that rages within our own selves.

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Revelation
Summers, Montague
Valhalla
Wild Hunt
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5. FORETELLING THE FUTURE

'Today is tomorrow's yesterday, but who knows what tomorrow brings?'

The urge to look ahead into the future is buried deep in the human consciousness. From prophecies and oracles, to astrology and fortunetelling by cards, palms or tea-leaves, the desire to know the future is still with us. Perhaps it is a way of controlling events, or imposing a known pattern on time, even a way of expressing hope and faith in better times. Whatever the reasons, fortune-telling has myriad forms, each with its individual rules and rituals. *See also* 9: Symbols & Meanings, Divination.

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6. BIRDS, PLANTS AND ANIMALS IN MYTH & FOLKLORE

'The magical mimicry by which a man turns himself into a beast may also be the magic by which he transforms himself into a god.'

Human beings have always been fascinated by other living things on earth. In an all-embracing urge to perceive magic in everything, we have included plants and animals in our belief systems and folktales, and this has provided us with a precious heritage. Flowers, herbs and trees have accumulated some wonderful stories – they can heal, lull you to sleep, bring you luck, ward off witches – and you can be enchanted in the uncanny forest. A similar tradition applies to animals – they have sometimes shared man's life on the most intimate terms.

CLASSIFIED SUBJECT GUIDE

Animals
Bat
Bear
Birds
Boar
Bull
Cat
Cock
Corn
Cow
Cuckoo
Dog
Dove
Eagle
Elephant
Fish
Garlic
Goat
Herbs
Holly and Ivy
Horse
Insects
Lily
Lion
Lotus
Mandrake
Mistletoe
Mushroom
Nightingale
Oak
Olive
Owl
Palm
Pelican
Pig
Plants & Flowers
Robin
Rose
Salmon
Scarab
Scorpion
Serpent
Spider
Toad
Trees
Wildwood
Yew

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7. NATURE, FERTILITY AND CREATION MYTHS

Why do the tides ebb and flow? Why is there day and night? What explanation is there for the succession of the seasons – for springtime and harvest, for rain and sun? How was the world created? Man's observation of Nature has profoundly influenced his religious ideas and practices, from simple Nature worship of trees and water, of sun and moon to beliefs in a Mother Goddess and fertility rites, and a vegetation spirit which annually dies and rises again.

CLASSIFIED SUBJECT GUIDE

Bread
Creation Myths
Dying God
Earth
Eclipse
Egg
Fertility
First Man
Food and Drink
Ganges
Harvest
Light
May Day
Midsummer Eve
Moon
Mother Goddess
New Year
Night
Rainbow
Sea
Sky
Spring
Springs and Wells
Stars
Stones
Sun
Time
Vegetation Spirits
Water
Winter

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8. RITES OF PASSAGE

The major landmarks of human experience – birth, puberty, marriage and death – are celebrated with rituals of powerful emotional resonance. They mark the passage from one stage of life to another and both celebrate and prepare the individual for the responsibilities and joys to come. Initiation rites, such as circumcision and ritual tattooing in primitive societies, often involve ordeals of endurance, suffering and torture. The communal participation in these rituals marks the common experience of humanity in the recurring cycle of the renewal and destruction of life.

CLASSIFIED SUBJECT GUIDE

Africa
Ashes
Baptism
Birth
Builders' Rites
Burial
Circumcision
Costume
Cremation
Crown
Cult of the Dead
Dance
Death
First
Harvest
Hearth
Initiation
Janus
Marriage
Menstruation
Mummification
Ordeal
Puberty
Relics
Rites of Passage
Ritual
Suttee
Tattooing
Threshold
Twins
Virginity

Birth

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9. SYMBOLS AND MEANINGS

'Through symbols, dances, pictures, man has given shape to the intangible, form to the invisible, flesh to the shadow.'

Men employ symbols because they invoke powerful associations and emotions. Symbols are found in art, drama and dance, from the earliest dance-dramas of hunting rituals, reflected in prehistoric cave-paintings, to the conscious use of symbols in paintings, poetry and religious iconography. The cross must be one of the best known of all religious symbols. It is simple and immediately recognizable. Religious architecture can also express a higher meaning.

CLASSIFIED SUBJECT GUIDE

Bells
Blake
Bosch
Cave Art
Children's Games
Costume
Cross
Dance
Dance of Death
Dancing Mania
Dante
Drama
Drum
Feng-Shui
Films
Folkplays
Folktales
Fool
Games
Goethe
Hammer
Head-dress
Hermaphrodite
Hobby-Horse
Horseshoe
Iconography
Landscape
Masks
Morris Dances
Music
Mystery Plays
Nursery Rhymes
Oil
Path Symbolism
Phallic Symbolism
Poets
Redon, Odilon
Riddles
Science Fiction & Fantasy
Scottish and Border Ballads
Ship
Swastika
Sword
Symbolism
Trumpet
Wagner
Wheel
Wings
Yeats

PRIMITIVE DANCE, DRAMA AND ART

General

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10. THE HERO'S QUEST

Human experience has mainly been turbulent and full of struggle. We have felt insignificant when ranged against the immensity of the universe. The other side of impotence is unlimited strength – the slaying of dragons, the daring of Hercules, the valour of Galahad, the vision of the knight in search of the Holy Grail. The vast majority of the human race may be weak and vulnerable but in many cultures heroic figures emerge to echo our braver dreams.

CLASSIFIED SUBJECT GUIDE

Achilles
Alexander the Great
Arthur
Attila
Beowulf
Bran
Brendan, St.
Camelot and Arthurian Britain
Cu Chulainn
Finn
Galahad
Gawain
Gilgamesh
Glastonbury
Grail
Greece
Gwydion
Hercules
Hero
Jack
Lancelot
Lleu
Mabinogion
Merlin
Morgan le Fay
Nibelungenlied
Odysseus
Parsifal
Prometheus
Robin Hood
Scandinavia
Siegfried
Theseus
Tristan
Troy
Wagner
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11: MYSTERIOUS CREATURES AND LANDS IN MYTH AND LEGEND

The creation of other lands, such as the legendary island of Atlantis, and fabulous creatures to inhabit them is a natural extension of magical thinking. Fairy tales, myths and legends are rich in such ideas, and they represent some very powerful archetypes of human experience. Dragons, fairies, dwarfs, centaurs, gorgons and harpies all impinge on us in their different ways, showing us a glimpse of the terror, helplessness and enchantment that lurks inside us all: 'charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas.'

CLASSIFIED SUBJECT GUIDE

- **Abominable Snowman**
- **Atlantis**
- **Centaur**
- **Changeling**
- **Chimaera**
- **Dragon**
- **Dwarfs**
- **Fairies**
- **Furies**
- **Giants**
- **Golem**
- **Gorgons**
- **Gremlin**
- **Harpy**
- **Kraken**
- **Lemuria & Mu**
- **Mermaids and Mermen**
- **Nymphs**
- **Phoenix**
- **Puck**
- **Roc**
- **Satyrs**
- **Scylla and Charybdis**
- **Sirens**
- **Sleepers**
- **Thunderbird**
- **Trolls**
- **Unicorn**

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12. WESTERN RELIGIONS

The major religions of Western civilisation profess one God. Judaism, the progenitor of all subsequent monotheistic religions is not, however, centred on a prophet or saviour but on the idea of a chosen people. It is as inconceivable to have Judaism without the Jewish people as it is to have Christianity without Jesus or Islam without Mohammed. Many of the central concepts of Judaism were incorporated into Christianity but Christians see their religion as the only true religion. Islam, though accepting Moses and Jesus as prophets, claims they were superseded by Mohammed.

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Atonement
Baptism
Berbers
Christianity
Christmas
Dead Sea Scrolls
Druzes
Easter and Holy Week
Election
Ethiopia
Fasting
Heresy
Islam
Jerusalem
Jesus
Judaism
Koran
Mary
Mass
Mecca and Medina
Mohammed
New Testament Apocrypha
Pilgrimage
Ritual
Sacraments
Sacrifice
Saints
Self-Denial
Touaregs
Yahweh
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13. EASTERN RELIGIONS

Five centuries before the birth of Christ, Buddhism originated in India though its most powerful influence was in China and the Far East. The supreme goal of its founder, the Buddha, or 'Enlightened One', was 'Nirvana' or liberation from the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Hinduism is a polytheistic religion, but also in a sense monotheistic, for the many gods are only manifestations of an immanent unifying principle which is regarded as an impassive absolute but may also appear as a personal God. Without a founder but with a body of sacred literature, the Veda, Hinduism is remarkable for its toleration of other faiths.

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Astral Body
Bahais
Bhagavad Gita
Brahman
Breath
Buddhism
Caste
China
Cow
Dualism
Fasting
Gesture
Hinduism
I Ching
India
Jains
Japan
Kali
Karma
Krishna
Kundalini
Lamas
Madness
Mahatmas
Mandala
Mantra
Meditation
Nirvana
Opposites
Parsees
Predestination
Ramakrishna
Ramana Maharshi
Sai Baba
Saints
Self-Denial
Shaman
Shinto
Shiva
Sikhs
Sinhalese Buddhism
Southeast Asia
Tantrism
Taoism
Tibet
Vedanta
Vedas
Vishnu
Yin and Yang
Yoga
Zen

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14. ANCIENT MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Wherever cultures have grown up, there are common universal themes running through their religions and mythologies. The myths and legends of the ancient world make a wonderful, colourful tapestry expressing the variety of local experiences and attitudes. The gods and goddesses of the ancient Greeks, Romans, Aztecs and Mayas, Northern Europeans and Celts reflect man's desire to explain the nature of the universe and the human psyche, the mysteries of birth and death, the progression of the seasons, the riddle of creation.

CLASSIFIED SUBJECT GUIDE

Amazons
Animism
Aphrodite
Apollo
Astarte
Athene
Aztecs
Baal
Balder
Book of the Dead
Bran
Brigit
Brittany
Celts
Circe
Crete
Cronus
Cybele
Demeter
Diana
Dionysus
Egypt
Eros
Etruscans
Finland
Freyr
Germanic Mythology
Greece
Grimm
Hecate
Hephaestus
Hera
Hermes
Hittites
Ikhnaten
Imhotep
Incas
Ishtar
Isis
Janus
Lapland
Lares
Loki
Mabinogion
Malta
Man
Marduk
Mars
Maya
Mesopotamia
Mithras
Nibelungenlied
Odin
Ohrmazd
Osiris
Pan
Parthians
Persephone
Phoenicians
Poseidon
Priests
Prostitution
Rome
Scandinavia
Serapis
Seth
Sibyls
Slavs
Syria and Palestine
Tammuz
Thor
Venus
Woman
Zeus

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15. FOLKLORE, PRIMITIVE BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

Early anthropologists assumed that the beliefs and ritual practices of the so-called 'primitive' peoples represented the earliest forms of religion: when magic did not work, man resorted to prayer and sacrifice. Others are interested in the social significance or in the psychological interpretation of these beliefs. Whatever their significance, primitive beliefs and customs are still very much alive in many parts of the world.

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16. PSYCHOLOGY AND THE PARANORMAL

As interest in the paranormal has grown, a number of psychical researchers have been investigating ways in which modern techniques can explore this area. Statistics and laboratory neutrality have been employed to examine such disparate experiences as ESP (extra-sensory perception); trance states; mediumistic powers; dreams; psychokinesis and faith healing. Research into the recesses of the mind is also the province of psychoanalysis. Theories of the unconscious, research into mesmerism and hypnotism, as well as acupuncture and homeopathy, are attempts to understand the link between the mind and the body, and its relevance for healing.

CLASSIFIED SUBJECT GUIDE

Automatic Art
Channelling
Cosmic Joker
Crookes, Sir William
Davenports
Dowsing
Doyle, Sir A. Conan
Dreams
Extra-Sensory Perception
Faith Healing
Freud
Gurney, Edmund
Home, D.D.
Homoeopathy
Jung, C.G.
Leonard, Mrs
Mediums
Mesmer
Myers, F.W.H.
Near-Death Experiences
Palladino, Eusapia
Permanent Paranormal Objects
Piper, Mrs
Poltergeists
Psychical Research
Psychokinesis
Psychometry
Radiesthesia
Schneider Bros.
Spiritualism
Spontaneous Combustion
Spontaneous psi Experiences
Trance
Willett, Mrs

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17. THE SOUL

'Where do we come from, and where are we going?'

The central issues concerning the meaning of our existence on earth always raise questions about the possibility of an after-life. As human beings we are uniquely concerned with the quality of consciousness. Do we have a soul, a spirit? Can this part of the self survive the body's death? If so, to what purpose? Are we re-incarnated, as so many people firmly believe? Every religion and mythology tries to explore these questions in some form or other.

CLASSIFIED SUBJECT GUIDE

Apparition
Cremation
Hell
Immortality
Incarnation
Interrogation of the Dead
Judgement of the Dead
Letters to the Dead
Paracelsus
Paradise
Plato's Myths
Plotinus
Predestination
Reincarnation
Sacrifice
Theurgy

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18. GHOSTS, VAMPIRES AND HAUNTINGS

Who has not shivered at the thought of being alone in a graveyard or haunted house at midnight? The continued popularity of ghost stories perhaps answers a basic need to believe in survival after death. Ancestor worship involved the need to propitiate the dead, and in all societies man has feared their return. Various theories have been put forward to explain why ghosts return: do they return to seek vengeance or for some other evil purpose? Do they seek proper burial or return to complete some task left undone in their life-time? Or do people who see ghosts experience only a temporary derangement of the senses? Societies for psychical research try to take a scientific view of ghosts.

See also 16. Psychology and the Paranormal.

CLASSIFIED SUBJECT GUIDE

Alien Visitors
Ancestor Worship
Apparition
Astral Travel
Bushmen
Burial
Dracula
Exorcism
Ghost Dance
Ghosts
Haunted Houses
Inuit
Navaho Indians
New Guinea
Nuer
Ozarks
Phantasms of the Living
Poltergeists
Psychical Research
Pueblo Indians
Science Fiction & Fantasy
Skull
Vampires
Werewolf

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19. MYSTICS

'All at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being . . .'

TENNYSON

Mystics, explorers of untrodden paths, often employ unusual techniques to apprehend spiritual truths that are inaccessible to the understanding. Despite differences between the eastern and western traditions, they all seek a direct unity with eternity, whether seen in terms of a personal God or as a state of consciousness.

CLASSIFIED SUBJECT GUIDE

Boehme, J.
Catherine of Siena
Cloud of Unknowing
Curé of Ars
Dervish
Eckhart, Meister
Fakir
Flagellation
Francis of Assisi, St.
Francis de Sales, St.
Hermit
Hilton, Walter
Ibn Arabi
Joan of Arc
John of the Cross
Julian of Norwich
Lavater, J.K.
Law, William
Neumann, Teresa
Quietism
Stigmata
Sufis
Swedenborg
Teilhard de Chardin
Teresa of Avila
Transcendental Meditation
Western Mystery Tradition

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20. UNORTHODOX CHRISTIANS

Thousands of people all over the world express their spiritual needs outside mainstream Christianity. In the Middle Ages heretics were persecuted by the Inquisition but compulsion only made men into hypocrites or martyrs. Audacious pioneers of unorthodox beliefs have tried to re-interpret Christianity in the light of new scientific developments or to make sense of social upheavals in the accepted order. Revivalism, messianic and millennarian sects, 'speaking in tongues' and faith-healing are all attempts to explore areas outside traditional doctrine and observances.

AMERICAN SECTS

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CLASSIFIED SUBJECT GUIDE

Anabaptists
Bogomils
Bruno, Giordano
Camisards
Cargo Cults
Cathars
Christian Science
Communistic Religious Movements
Conselheiro, A.
Convulsionaries
Dead Sea Scrolls
Deism
Divine Principles
Doukhobors
Dunkers
Ebionites
Eckhart, Meister
Ecstasy
Eddy, Mary Baker
End of the World
Enthusiasm
Exclusive Brethren
Faith Healing
Flagellation
Fox, George
Friends, Society of
Girlingites
Gnosticism
Heresy
Holiness Movement
Holy Rollers
Huguenots
Hutterian Brethren
Illuminati
Inquisition
Jehovah's Witnesses
Knights Templar
Manicheans
Montanists
Messianic Movements
Moonies
Moral Rearmament
Mormons
Myers, F.W.H.
New Templars
New Thought
Old Believers
Peculiar People
Pentecostalist Movement
Prince, H.J.
Quietism
Second Coming
Shakers
Skoptsy
Snake-handling Cults
Speaking-in-Tongues
Spiritualism
Waldenses
Walworth Jumpers
Women's Mysteries

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21. OCCULTISTS AND THEOSOPHISTS

Charlatans and scoundrels? Or guardians of an arcane wisdom? Their lore is veiled in secrecy, shrouded in mystery, known only to the initiated few. Occultists, Rosicrucians, magicians and that most popular of present-day secret societies, the Freemasons, practise rituals, including secret signs and words. Theories of the occult and the Cabala try to explain the structure of the universe: the macrocosm and the microcosm, the Tree of Life and the system of correspondences which unites all creation. Though they claim, along with Theosophists, to be outside, or to embrace, all religions, they believe in a spiritual background to existence.

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Coleridge
Crookes, William
Crowley, Aleister
Curé of Ars
Davenports
Dee, John
Doyle, Arthur Conan
Druids
Fludd, Robert
Fortune, Dion
Freemasonry
Geller, Uri
Germanen Order
Gilles de Rais
Golden Dawn
Gurdjieff
Gurney, Edmund
Hermetica
Home, D.D.
Lavater, J.K.
Leonard, Mrs
Levi, Eliphas
List, Guido von
Lull, Raymond
Luria, Isaac
Lytton, Bulwer
Mankind United
Manning, Matthew
Martinists
Masters
Mathers, S.L.
National Socialism
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Nostradamus
Ouspensky
Rasputin
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Rosicrucians
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Abbots Bromley
Scene of the annual Horn Dance in September; no one knows how old the dance is but its closest parallels are the ritual dances of primitive societies, reaching back to the Stone Age.
See HORNS.

After the executions of the Aberdeen witches in 1597, it was said that the black reek and stench of the burnings hung over the town for weeks. The victims were strangled to death before their bodies were burned. Many innocent people were undoubtedly accused but there is some evidence for the existence of a real witch organization in north-east Scotland

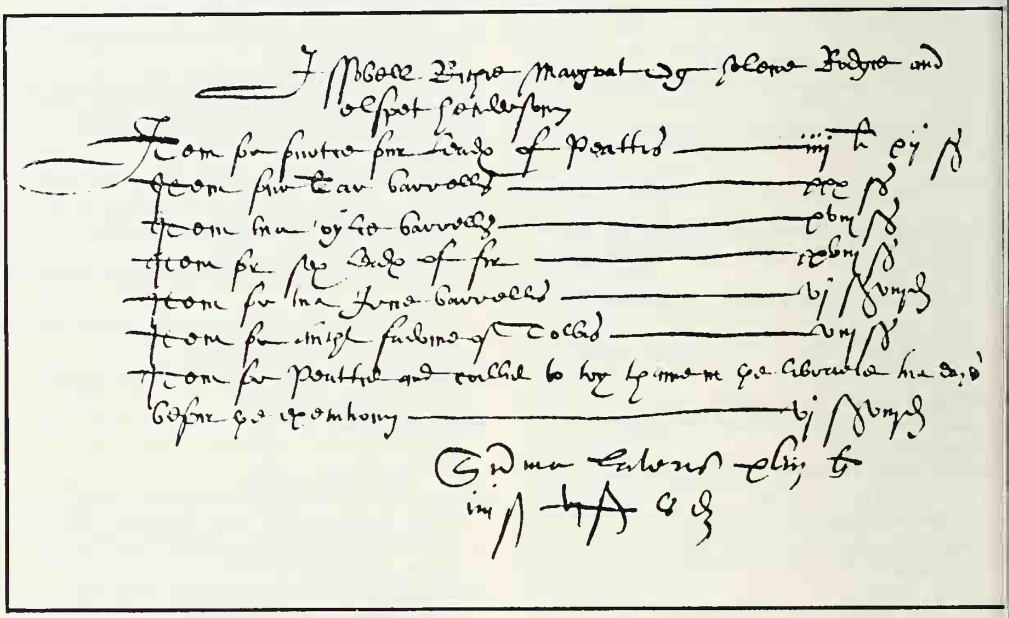
ABERDEEN WITCHES

IN THE ARCHIVES of the city of Aberdeen is a remarkable collection of documents *(Records of the Dean of Guild, 1596–1597)* which give details of the proceedings against many persons accused of 'the detestable practice of witchcraft and sorcery'. Marginal notes indicate that the documents were those used in court, most of them consisting of 'dittays', or charges against the accused.

The collection of evidence against those suspected of witchcraft and sorcery was made by the ministers and elders of the Reformed Church in the various parishes. Unhappily, suspects could be named by anyone – a feature that afforded full scope to the malicious – and many harmless old people were named. Suspects were summoned before the Kirk Sessions for examination and those considered guilty were remanded to Aberdeen Assizes. Even when allowance is made for the ignorance and superstition of the time, it is difficult to excuse the ministers of the Gospel, educated men, whose evidence was the means of sending many innocent people to a horrible end.

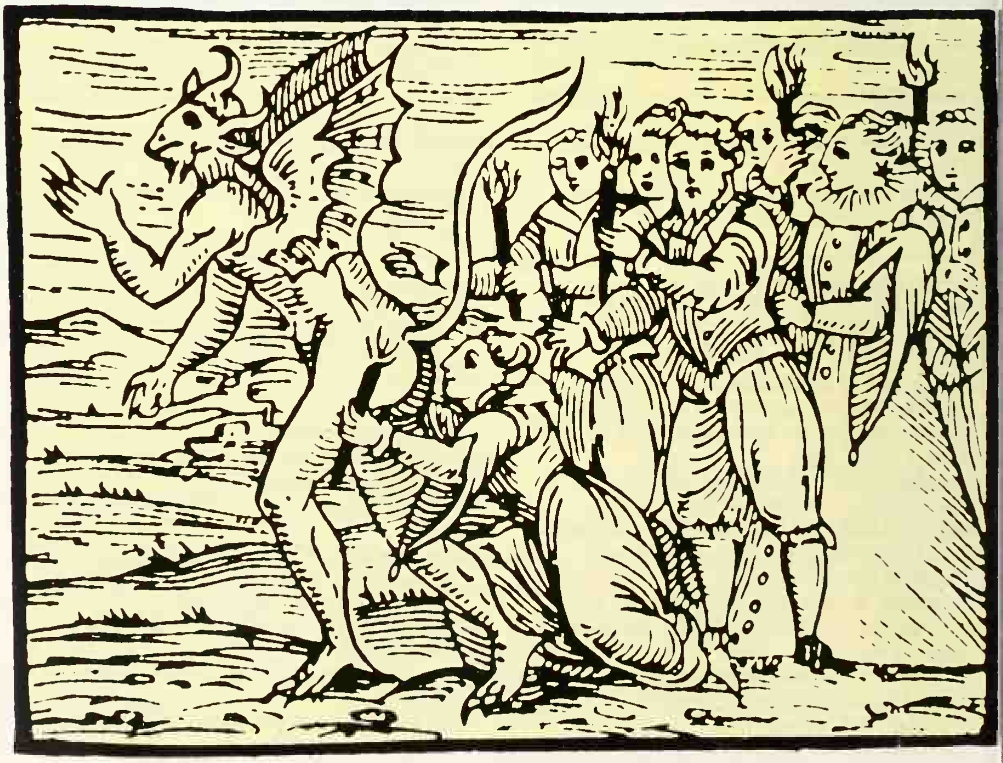
However, some of the evidence suggests that there existed a definite organization practising the black art in north-east Scotland; the group known to history as the Aberdeen witches.

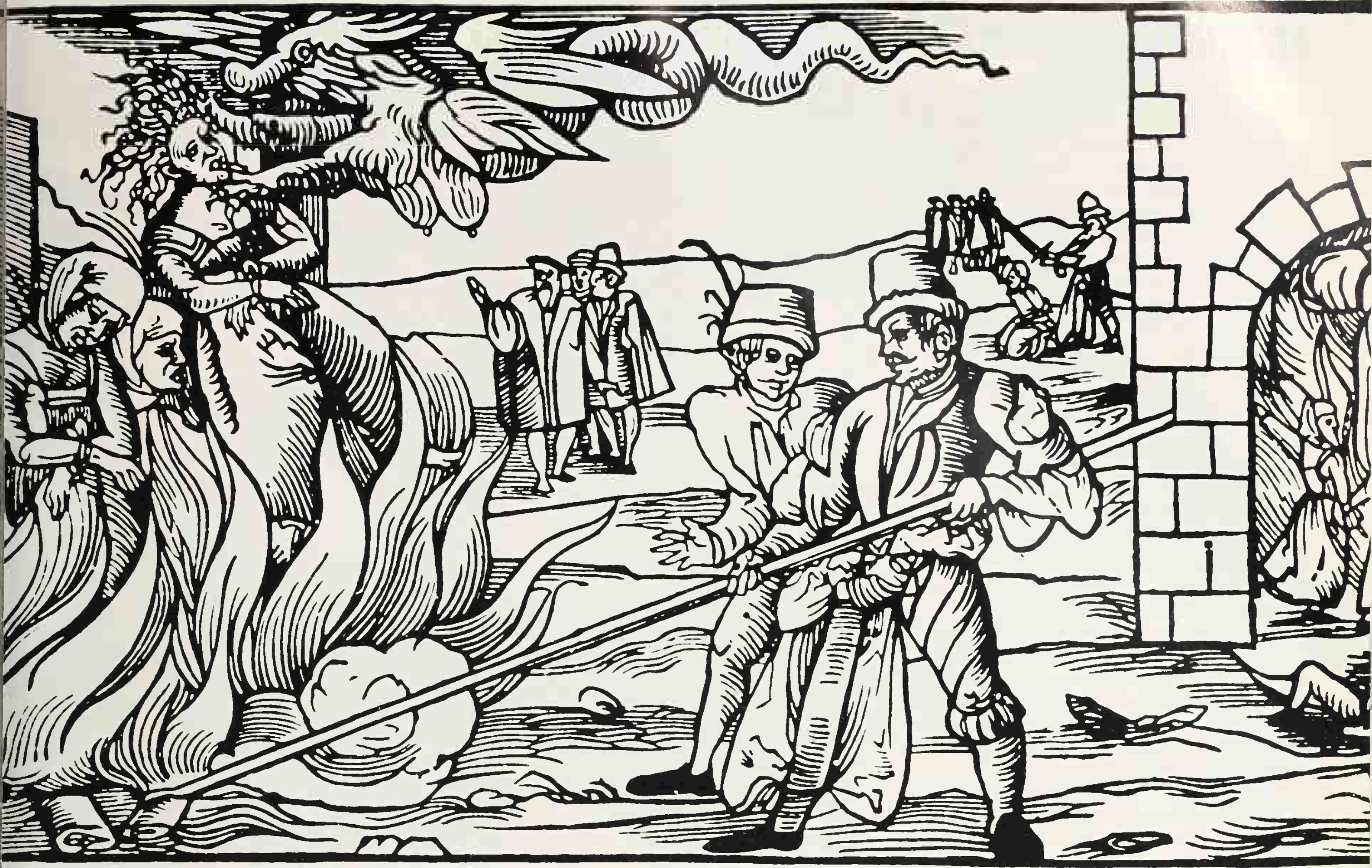
Two main points can be established concerning the group. First, the practice of witchcraft was a confidential cult, almost a family concern, its secrets handed down from generation to generation. Secondly, it was well organized, and although each of its members operated individually in their own localities each was required to attend general meetings, to take part in the ceremonies and for instruction in 'working woe' (doing harm).



Above Part of the accounts of money spent on the execution of four witches. These include items for coal, peat, tar barrels, the stake, rope, and the fee of the executioner

Below Witches were frequently accused of paying bestial and revolting homage to the Devil by kissing his backside: from Guazzo's *Compendium Maleficarum,* 17th century





Mansell Collection

The European obsession with witchcraft raged for about 300 years. In Germany, as in Scotland and France, it was the custom to strangle or hang the witches before burning them to ashes. Burning three witches at Derneburg, Germany, in 1555

The Devil and the Queen of Elphen

The witches were organized in covens – groups of 13. At the general meetings the Devil himself presided, usually 'in the likeness of a great grey stag, boar or dog'. Presumably he was a man dressed as an animal. The meetings were said to involve dancing and sexual relations with the Devil – who went under the name of Christsonday – and with a woman called the Queen of Elphen (queen of the elves) who, 'is said to be very pleasant, and she can seem old or young when she pleases, and she makes whoever she likes king, and lies with whoever she likes'. They were accused of saluting the Devil and the Queen by kissing them on the buttocks. There seems to have been no age limit on entrance and many of the accused testified to having been introduced as young children.

Each member of a coven specialized in some particular form of sorcery and these covered a wide range. Isobel Cockie bewitched mills and livestock, while Margaret Ogg devoted her attentions to butcher-meat with dire results; Helen Rogie brought illness and death by modelling figures of her victims in lead or wax, and Isobel Strachan was notorious as a fascinator of nice young men; Isobel Ritchie made a special line in confectionery for expectant mothers, while Isobel Ogg's forte was the raising of storms. It would seem that the witches had one faculty which was common to all, that of causing 'the sudden sickness' whereby their victims lay 'one half of the day roasting as if in an oven, with an unquenchable thirst, the other half of the day melting away with an extraordinary cold sweat'.

Perhaps the most dramatic moment in the Aberdeen Assizes came when Andrew Man turned king's evidence against his colleagues. A witch from boyhood and the father of several children by the Queen of Elphen, he convinced the Court that, with his long and extensive experience, he was in the unique position of being able to identify any witch or warlock brought before him. Accordingly, he was appointed official witch-finder to the Assizes and with a three-inch needle pricked the suspects' bodies for the 'Devil's Mark' – a spot insensible to pain and believed to be inflicted by the Devil.

Strangled by the Executioner

While awaiting trial, the suspects were confined either in the cells of the Tolbooth or in Our Lady's Pity-vault, for the Reformation had brought degradation to this place of worship. A number of the accused took their own lives in prison and their bodies were thrown outside to be dragged through the streets until their battered, shapeless carcasses were unrecognizable.

When the Assizes closed in April 1597, 24 people – 23 women and one man – had been found guilty of witchcraft. All were condemned to death – 'to be taken out between the hills, bound to a stake, strangled by the executioner, and their bodies burnt to ashes'. The few whose guilt was 'not proven' were ordered to be branded on the cheek and banished. The final tragic scene took place 'between the hills', in the grassy hollow lying between Aberdeen's Castle-hill and the neighbouring Heading-hill – the depression now covered by Commerce Street – and the 'black reek and stench from the burnings hung over the burgh for many weeks'.

At one stage in the Assizes, it appeared that the number of executions would increase and the Dean of Guild, fearing rising costs might prejudice the burnings, took it upon himself to lay in a supply of coal to the value of £26 4s. His foresight paid dividends as shown by the final entry in the records dated 21 September 1597, which states that the provost, baillies and council 'considering the faithfulness shown by William Dun, the Dean of Guild, in the discharge of his duty, and, besides this, his extraordinary taking pains on the great number of witches burnt this year and to encourage others to work as diligently in the discharge of their office, grant and assign to him the sum of £47 3s 4d'.

Before the end of the year and while the subject of witchcraft and sorcery was still in people's minds, King James VI of Scotland (later James I of England) published his book *Demonologie* in defence of witch hunting. It proved to be a best seller.

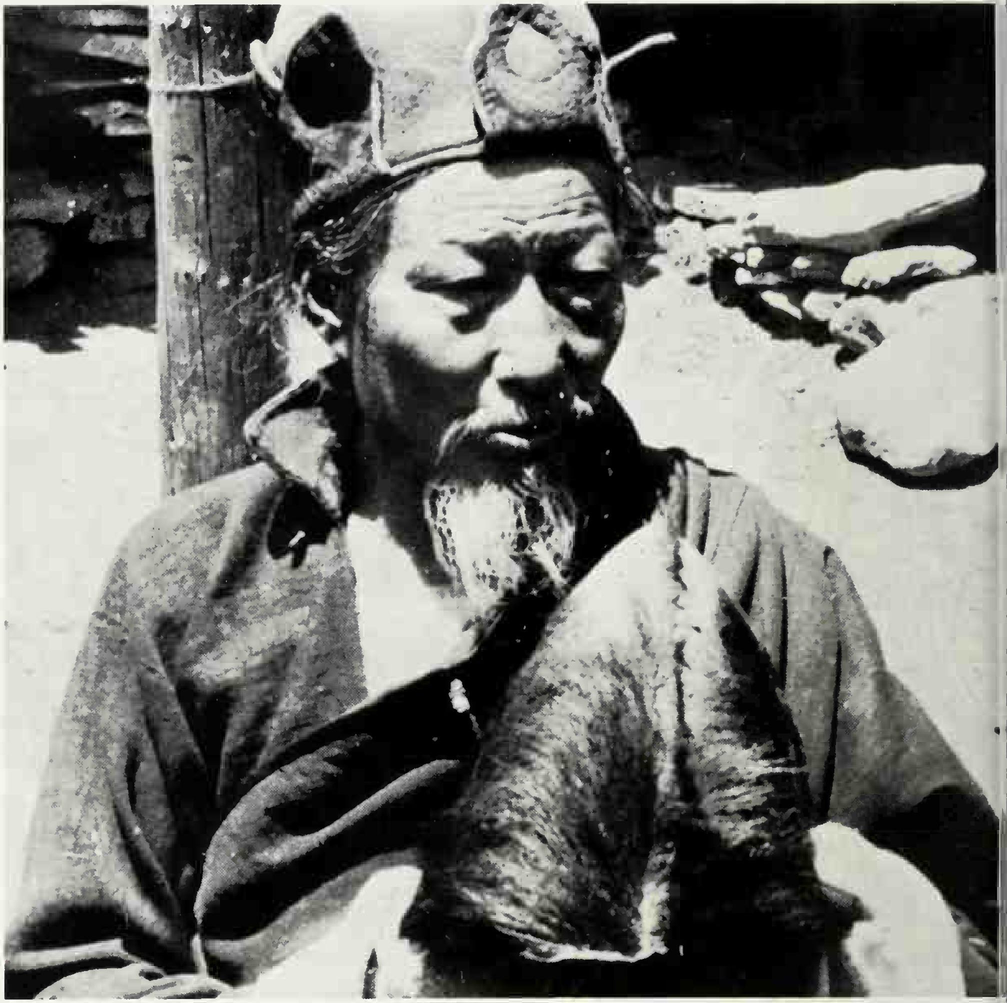
FENTON WYNESS

ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN of the Himalayas is supposed to be a creature half-human and half-animal, hairy and about the size of a child of 12 or 14, which walks erect on two legs, swinging its arms. Its hair is described as reddish or light brown, and not very thick. European travellers called the snowman 'abominable' because of the horror with which the Sherpas, a Himalayan people, regard the creatures which they call *yeti*.

Expeditions have searched without success for the yeti. Mountaineers have found what were thought to be its footprints in the snow, but research has revealed that these tracks were made by other animals. Anthropologists have shown that the Sherpas' stories are questionable, and the view that the snowman is a legend is now widely accepted. Legends of hairy mountain-men have also been reported from the Gobi desert, Mongolia and the Rockies near Canada's Pacific coast.

According to Sherpa folklore a monkey king was converted to Buddhism and lived as a hermit in the mountains. An ogress fell in love with him and he abandoned his solitary life to marry her. The children she bore him were covered in hair and had tails, and they were the first yeti.



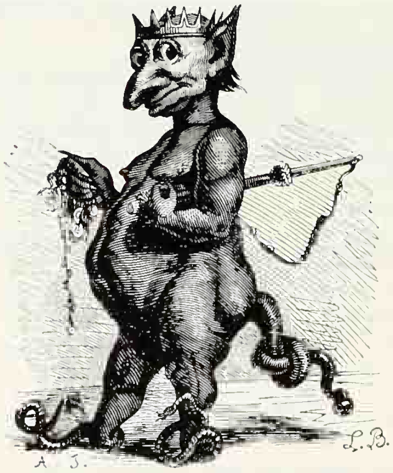
A Tibetan holding a cap allegedly made from the scalp of a yeti. It has been shown that these caps are really made of deer-hide

ABRACADABRA

THE WORD ABRACADABRA has been so widely used in magic that it has passed into the patter of the stage conjuror and appears in dictionaries as a term for magical nonsense-words in general. Daniel Defoe, in his *Journal of the Plague Year,* published in 1722, says that many people who were terrified of the plague acted as if it was an evil spirit which threatened to take possession of their bodies. They tried to ward it off with 'certain words or figures, as particularly the word Abracadabra formed in a triangle or pyramid.'

In the Middle Ages the word was believed to cure fevers. The earliest instructions for using it come from a poem on medicine by Quintus Serenus Sammonicus, a doctor who accompanied the Roman Emperor Severus on his expedition to Britain in 208 AD. It has to be written down, dropping a letter in each line. The usual way of writing it is:

A B R A C A D A B R A
A B R A C A D A B R
A B R A C A D A B
A B R A C A D A
A B R A C A D
A B R A C A
A B R A C
A B R A
A B R
A B
A



'Abracax', a demon with snakes for feet, associated with abracadabra. From Collin de Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal,* 1863

The paper on which the word is written must be tied round the patient's neck with flax, worn for nine days, and then thrown backwards over the shoulder into a stream which runs eastwards.

The idea is evidently that as the word shrinks away to nothing, so will the fever. Several other shrinking charms of this kind are known, including a Jewish spell against a demon named Shabriri, thought to cause diseases of the eye. To get rid of him, you say Shabriri Briri Riri Iri Ri, whittling him away to nothing.

Abracadabra resembles, and may be descended from, a Jewish cure for fever:

> Ab Abr Abra Abrak Abraka
> Abrakal Abrakala Abrakal
> Abraka Abrak Abra Abr Ab
>
> And the people called unto Moses and Moses prayed to God and the fire abated. May healing come from heaven from all kinds of fever and consumption – heat to N son of N.
>
> Amen Amen Amen. Selah Selah Selah.

This must also be hung round the patient's neck, and he must not look at it for the next 24 hours. It apparently builds the heat of the fever up to breaking-point and then makes it dwindle away, as 'the fire' abates.

Another possibility is that Abracadabra is connected with Abraxas, a god who appears on magical charms, gems and rings used to ward off evil from the 2nd century AD onwards. Abraxas originated with the followers of an eccentric Christian thinker named Basilides, who taught at Alexandria from about 120 to 140. One of his theories was that Jesus had not really been crucified.

The followers of Basilides seem to have constructed the name Abraxas for the god who ruled each year and its 365 days. The letters of the Greek alphabet also stood for numbers, and the Greek letters of Abraxas add to 365. Below this god were 365 orders of spirits, occupying 365 heavens, the lowest of which was the domain of the spirits who rule the Earth. The seven letters of Abraxas may stand for the seven planets known in antiquity, believed in astrology to control the workings of fate.

The central character of Homer's Iliad *was honoured as a semi-divine being, and his effect on Western ideas of 'the hero' has lasted to the present day*

ACHILLES

THE PLOT OF THE *Iliad*, one of the most blood-drenched stories ever told, turns on the pride and the ungovernable temper of Achilles (Achilleus in Greek), the most formidable of the Greek champions who laid siege to Troy. 'The Wrath of Achilles is my theme', Homer begins, 'that fatal wrath which . . . sent the gallant souls of many noblemen to Hades, leaving their bodies as carrion for the dogs and passing birds.'

The *Iliad* is usually dated to the 8th century BC. It is quite possible that Achilles was originally a real man, however legendary the exploits with which Homer and later authors credited him. Homer calls him 'the great runner' for his skill as an athlete and 'the city-sacker' for his prowess as a fighter. In Hesiod, who wrote some years after Homer, he is 'lion-hearted Achilles, the destroyer of men'. Later still, as a result of the fame which the *Iliad* brought him, he was honoured in many parts of the Greek world as a hero, a being halfway between a god and a man.

At the village of Achilleum near Troy there was a temple sacred to Achilles and a statue of the hero wearing, oddly enough, a woman's earring. At Elis on the Greek mainland he had a monument and on a certain day, towards sunset, the women of Elis honoured him by lamenting his death. He had a temple and a statue on Leuce, the White Island in the Black Sea opposite the mouths of the Danube, where offerings were made to him and games were held in his honour. It was said that passing sailors heard his voice across the water, reciting Homer to the accompaniment of the clash of battle and the thunder of horses' hooves.

The Wrath of Achilles

The story of the *Iliad* begins, in the tenth year of the siege of Troy, when the Greek supreme commander, Agamemnon, seized a beautiful slave-girl who had been allotted to Achilles as a prize of battle. Insulted, Achilles refused to fight any more and his absence gravely weakened the Greek resistance to fierce Trojan attacks. Agamemnon tried to make the quarrel up, offering to return the girl to Achilles with many splendid gifts. But Achilles was still nursing his fury and refused to be reconciled.

Lacking Achilles, the situation of the Greeks now became so dangerous that Patroclus, the dearly loved friend of Achilles, went out to fight the Trojans. Patroclus was killed by the best of the Trojan warriors, Hector. When this news was brought to him, Achilles became berserk with grief and rage, and readied himself for battle – in spite of the warning from his mother, the sea-nymph Thetis, that he was doomed to die after Hector's death.

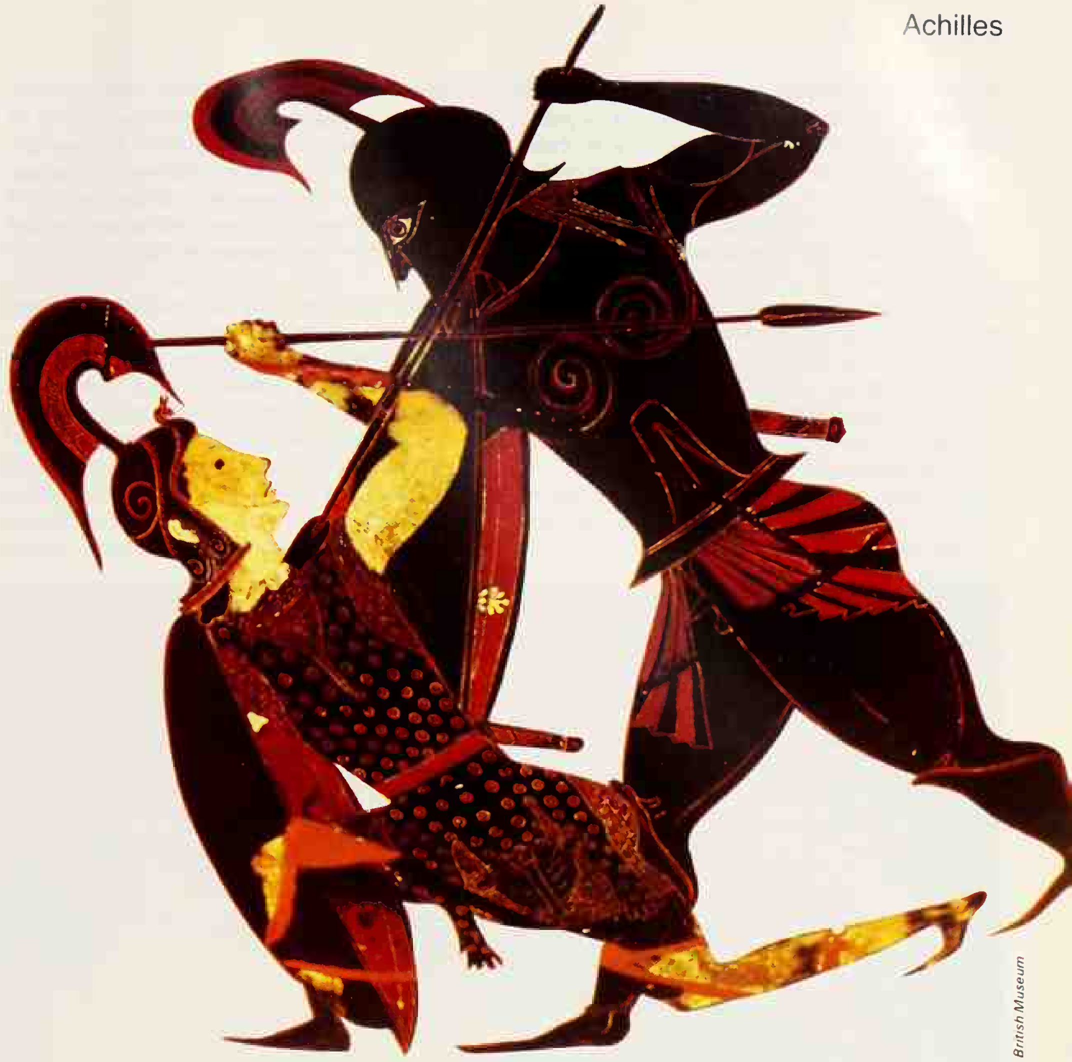
Next day, bearing new arms given to him by the gods, Achilles 'chased his victims with the fury of a fiend, and the earth was dark with blood'. His horses trampled over dead men and fallen shields as he raged on in search of glory, until he found Hector and killed him in single combat, gloating over the Trojan's death agony.

Achilles maltreated Hector's corpse, dragging it in the dust behind his chariot, and he intended to throw it to the dogs to gnaw. But Hector's father persuaded him to return the body to the Trojans so that it could be decently buried.

The *Iliad* ends with the funeral rites for Hector but it is clear that Achilles has not long to live and that he will be killed by Hector's brother Paris and the archer-god Apollo. The *Odyssey* describes his death in battle, with the flower of the Greek and Trojan warriors falling round him in the struggle over his corpse. The sea-nymphs came from the ocean to weep salt tears for him and the nine Muses sang his dirge. His bones were mingled with those of his friend Patroclus and buried outside Troy.

Something Superhuman

Achilles has all the virtues of the Homeric hero. He is brave, passionate, ferocious in battle, beautiful to look at, intensely proud, fated to an early death. His failing is his uncontrollable anger. His treatment of Hector's corpse is so savage that Homer calls it 'shameful outrage' and condemns as 'an evil thing' his slaughter of a dozen Trojan prisoners at the funeral of Patroclus. When Hector's father comes to beg for his son's body, Achilles tries to console him and mercifully gives him the corpse. But even then he is sufficiently aware of his weakness to be afraid that he may suddenly fly into a rage and kill the old man.


British Museum

The greatest of the Homeric heroes and the central character of the *Iliad*, Achilles was later worshipped as a semi-divine being. Famed for his savagery in battle, he is here shown slaying Penthesilea, the queen of the Amazons. From an Attic amphora

Achilles' Heel

Many of the best-known stories about Achilles appear in later writers, including some which have parallels in folk tales all over the world, like the story that his mother tried to make him immortal by dipping him into a fire, but her husband thought she was trying to kill the child and stopped her. A famous variant of this is that she dipped him in the Styx, the river of the underworld, which made all of him deathproof except the heel by which she held him. It was in this heel that he received his mortal wound, from an arrow fired by Paris or Apollo.

His mother, Thetis, was so beautiful that both Zeus and the sea-god Poseidon desired her. But she was fated to bear a son who would be mightier than his father, and when the two gods heard this their ardour cooled, and they gave her in marriage to a mortal named Peleus. It was at the wedding of Thetis and Peleus that the apple marked 'for the fairest' was thrown among the gods, the apple of discord that caused the Trojan War in which Achilles met his death.

Achilles was only a boy when the Greek

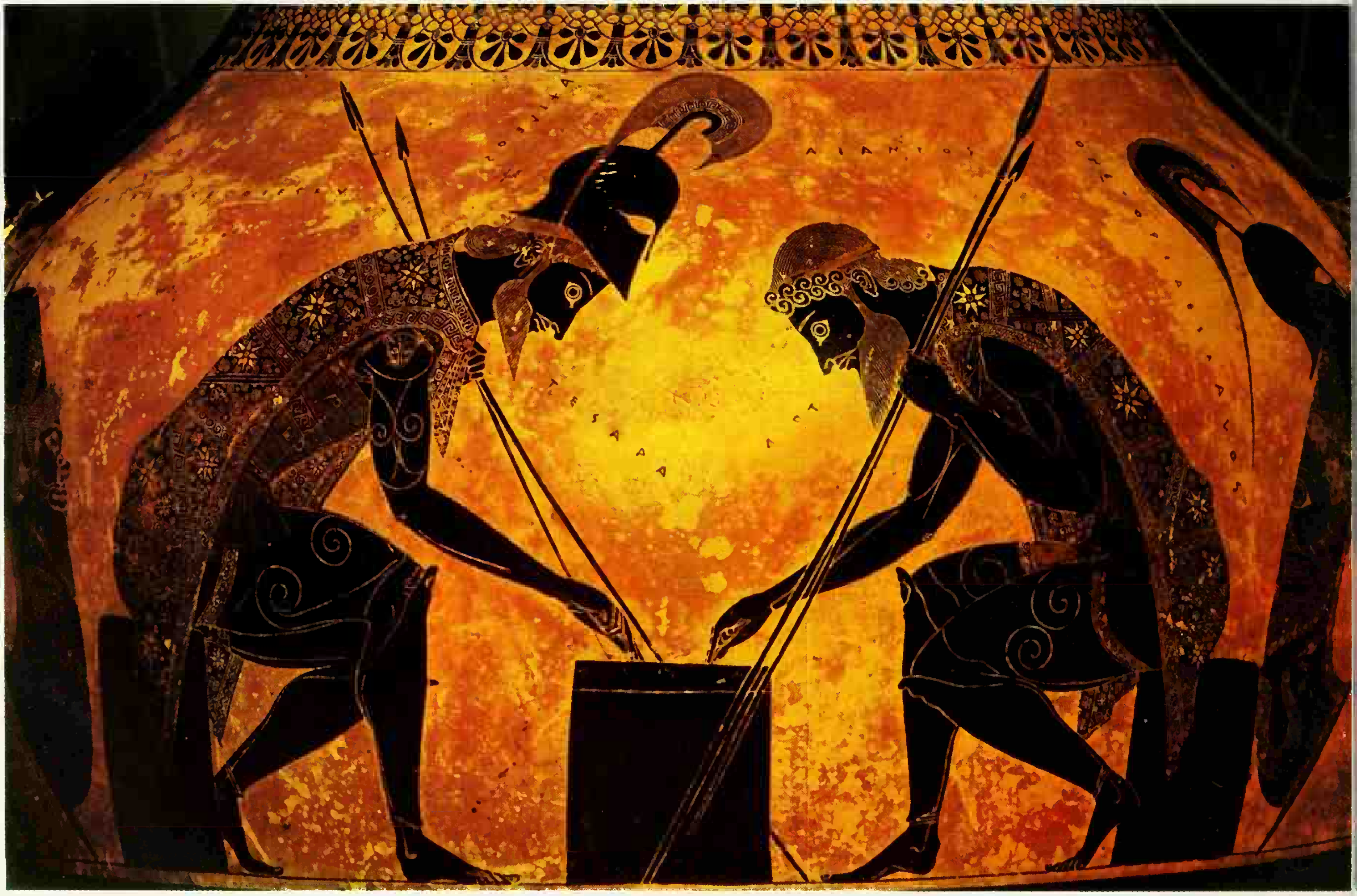
armies gathered for the siege of Troy. His mother hid him on the island of Scyros, where he was dressed as a girl and brought up with the king's daughters. But the crafty Odysseus came to Scyros bringing presents of cloth for dressmaking and also a spear and a shield. Achilles revealed himself by ignoring the cloth and seizing the weapons. What name Achilles bore when hidden among the women is an old problem. One suggestion is that he was called Pyrrha, 'red-head', for the colour of his hair.

At Troy, after the death of Hector, Achilles is said to have defeated various other notable fighters, including Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons, a tribe of warrior women, who had come to fight on the Trojan side. When he had killed her with a spear-thrust, he was so smitten by her beauty that he made love to her dead body.

Some said that Achilles and Patroclus were homosexual lovers. There is no such suggestion in Homer but the accusation was made against many famous figures.

Most of these later stories, to a modern eye at least, tend to lessen the stature of the hero, as compared with the picture of him in Homer. But there is a suitably grim tale in the *Hecuba* of Euripides. After the fall o Troy, the ghost of Achilles rose in the shee of golden armour and stood high on the cres of his tomb, demanding its share of th spoil, in the shape of Polyxena, daughter o the king of Troy. The Greeks slaughtere the girl on Achilles' grave-mound, so tha she could accompany her new master t the after-world, and the blood welled fro her neck over her golden robes.

FURTHER READING: Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* both translated by R. Fitzgeral (Doubleday, 1975); M. Grant, *Myths of th Greeks and Romans* (New American Library, 1964); R. Graves, *The Greek Myth* (Braziller, 1959); and see also M. I. Finley *The World of Odysseus* (revised edition, Viking Press, 1978).



Achilles, on the left, gaming with another Greek leader, Ajax. Games and contests of all kinds were dear to the hearts of the warrior-aristocrats who were Homer's heroes. Achilles seems to have won, as beside him is written the Greek for 'four', while beside Ajax is 'three'. From an amphora, c 530 BC

ACORN

AS THE FRUIT of the oak tree, which is sacred to so many cultures, the acorn has found a place in a good deal of magical lore. It has been a fertility symbol, along with most other seeds, nuts and fruits – though acorns always imply a special kind of long-term, high-potency fertility. It has been widely used as a good-luck charm: even today replicas of acorns are found with other talismans on key rings or charm bracelets.

In an old European form of marriage divination, an anxious young girl might take two acorns. She would name one of them for herself and the other for her lover, and drop them into a basin of water. If they floated together, the lovers would marry happily. Otherwise, the omen was bad.

A traditional British belief states that acorns should be carried as a means of preserving youthfulness. In the southern USA, the acorn entered into folk medicine, as a cure for rheumatism.

The ancient Celtic Druids, who venerated the oak, ate acorns as part of their ritual preparation for foretelling the future. In Scandinavian myth, the oak was sacred to the thunder god Thor, and so acorns would be placed in windows to appease the god and protect the house against lightning. Some of this latter practice has lasted into quite recent times: the roller window blinds which were widely popular a few years ago often had tassels on them shaped like acorns.

The acorn fills a central role in the religion of many Californian Indian tribes. For them, acorns were the main staple food (aside from fish), as vital to their well-being as maize was to tribes east of the mountains. So tales about acorns abound in the mythology of tribes such as the Luiseño. Other tribes, like the Hupa or Yuki, held a great annual Acorn Feast as the central feature of their harvest celebrations. In that ritual, acorns were ceremonially cooked and eaten while prayers were made to the god of vegetation, to protect the stored crop and to ensure future harvests.

(See also OAK.)

This Chinese medical technique of jabbing the atient with needles seems to concentrate ntirely on physical treatment of disease but in act it is based on beliefs about supernatural orces at work in the body

ACUPUNCTURE

CUPUNCTURE is a system of healing which s centuries old in China, is still used there nd taught in medical schools, and has been ractised fairly extensively in the West ince the 1930s. Needles are inserted into he skin, to a depth of about a tenth of an nch. They are left for a few minutes and hen removed. 'To the casual observer', says elix Mann, a leading Western authority on he subject, 'it could appear that what had een done was negligible and yet, in the ight kind of case (whether severe or mild), he result can be such as to give the impression that the cure was effected by magic.'

The impression of magic comes partly rom the fact that the needles are often nserted at points which have no apparent onnection with the ailment that is being reated. A needle stuck into the little toe an cure headache, for biliousness a needle may be inserted into the patient's shoulder, nd acupuncturists usually attack hay fever by treating the liver. There is no doubt that acupuncture is sometimes effective but no satisfactory scientific explanation of it has yet been produced.

Philosophically, acupuncture is based on theories about forces which are believed to govern everything in the universe, including human health. Medically, it is based on the fact that points on the body's surface become tender as a result of illness. If you have a headache, for instance, you may develop tender spots at the junction of the neck and the back of the head. When these spots are pressed, the pain is relieved.

The Chinese discovered about a thousand points on the skin where stimulation relieves or cures disease. These points are divided into 12 systems. All the points belonging to any one system are connected by an invisible line called a meridian, and each meridian is linked with one of the major organs of the body, including the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys and bladder.

The meridian of the liver runs from near the liver to the inside of the leg and down to the big toe. The heart meridian runs from the heart down the inside of the arm to the little finger, which is roughly the track along which you feel pain if you have a heart attack.

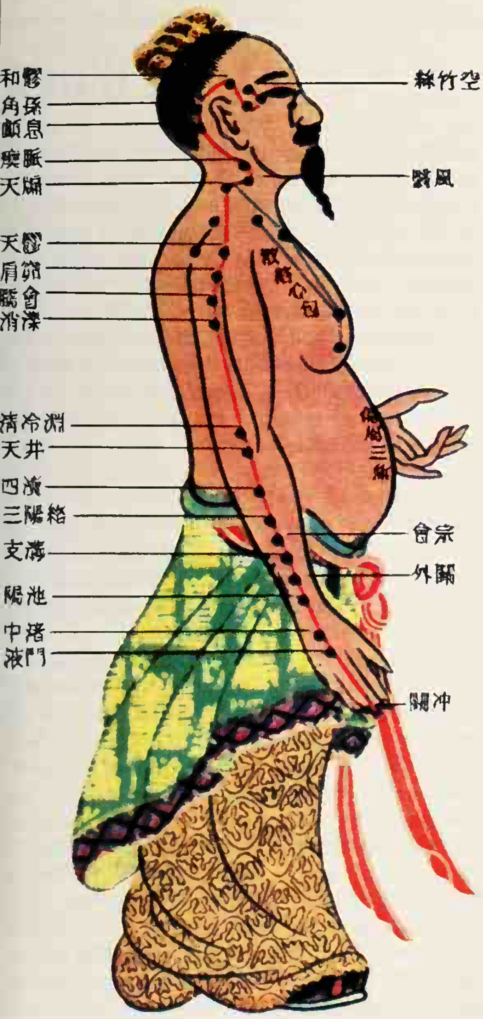
Each of the points has its own name. The point on the spleen meridian called Tian Xi, Heavenly Ravine, is connected with bronchitis, rebellious cough, throat noises, peptic ulcer and other conditions. The point Yung Men, Cloud Gate, on the lung meridian may be treated to relieve shortness of breath, asthma, rheumatism and swelling of the neck, tonsillitis or acne.

Some of the points correspond to the vital spots which are attacked in judo and karate. The two points on the neck at the base of the skull, which can be treated to cure headache and nosebleed, can also be struck to produce unconsciousness. Some points are related to those used in yoga. To promote efficient breathing on long walks, yogis may stimulate the point in the armpit which is on the lung meridian of acupuncture.

The Twelve Pulses

Acupuncture is concerned not only with healing but also with preventing disease. The Chinese attitude to medicine leans heavily towards keeping people in good health to begin with, rather than waiting for them to be ill and then trying to cure them: so much so that they produced a system which is the reverse of our own: Chinese patients paid the doctor as long as they stayed healthy and stopped paying him when they fell ill. When a disease first develops, before it takes hold and shows itself, there is a stage when the body's mechanism is slightly disturbed, but not enough for the patient to notice his symptoms. It is this type of condition which the acupuncturist tries to diagnose and halt.

Diagnosis is made by taking the pulse. The pulses at the left and right wrists are each divided into six sections, giving 12 pulses in all, corresponding to the 12 meridians. Each pulse may have any of 27 qualities, on which the doctor's diagnosis depends. The sensitivity required in taking the pulse is so fine that not only is the patient's present condition accurately determined but past illnesses described and future ones predicted.

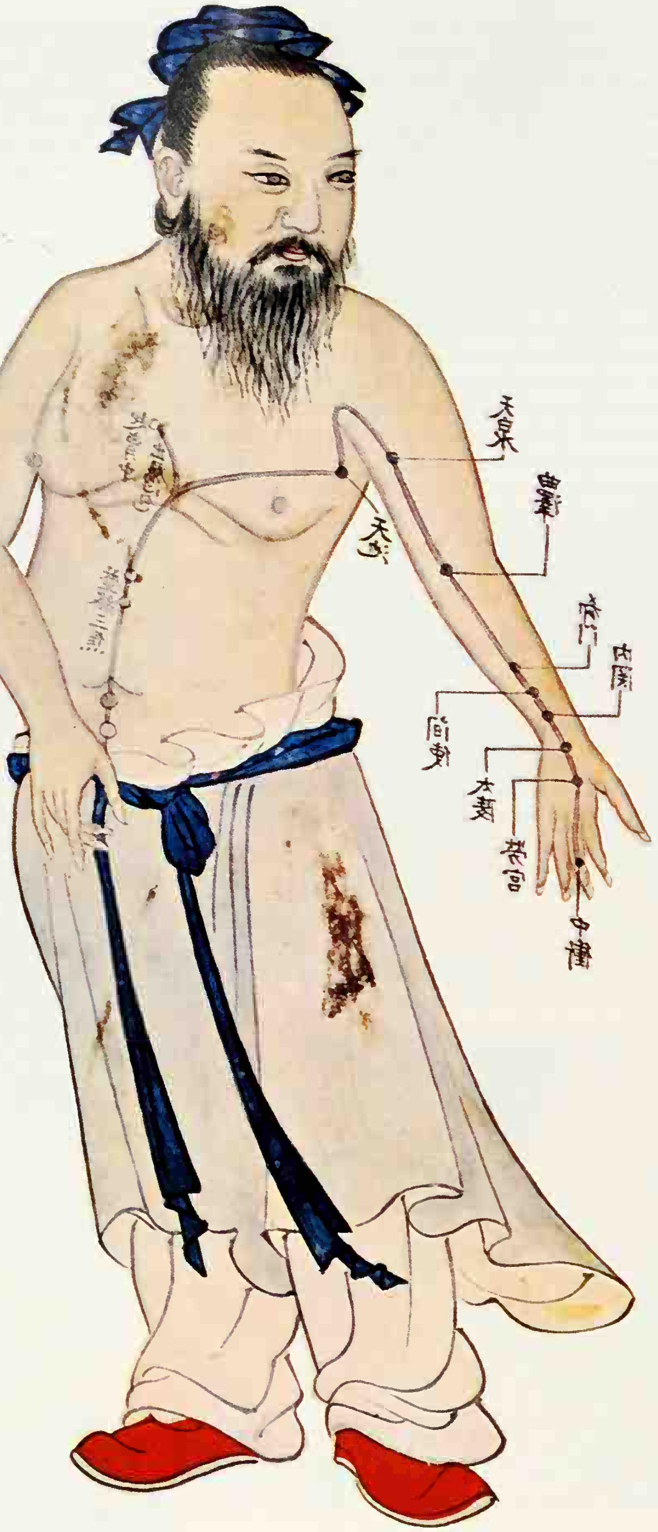


John Adams

John Adams

John Adams

In acupuncture needles are inserted into one or more of a thousand points on the skin, to relieve pain or cure disease. The points are divided into 12 systems and all the points in a system are connected by a line called a meridian *1* This chart shows some of the points and meridians. *2* and *3* Acupuncture has become popular in the West since the 1930s. A patient undergoing treatment, with needles placed in the neck and shoulders. *4* This box contains needles used by a modern Western acupuncturist



Courtesy of Wellcome Trustees

The Flow of Qi

Acupuncture is extremely ancient and th oldest book on the subject, the *Nei Jing* c Book of the Yellow Emperor, dates from 200 BC but contains material which is muc older. It has been suggested that the syster developed when people noticed that a warric slightly wounded in battle by a blow from stone or a sharp weapon, might be cured c some ailment by the wound.

Acupuncture depends on belief that i the healthy human body there is a con tinuous circulation of vital energy or 'lif force'. This energy is called Qi (or Ch'I) which basically means 'air' or 'breath' The identification of the life force with ai based on the simple observation that yo cannot live without breathing, is found a over the world (see BREATH).

Qi circulates through the 12 meridians starting from the lungs which draw breath once every 24 hours. If it fails to flow pro perly, the organs of the body will suffer fron a deficiency of energy or, where it is blocked from a surplus of it. Acupuncture tries t bring the flow of life force back to normal b 'sedating' a meridian which has too much Q or 'tonifying' a meridian which has too little

If a meridian is 'empty', deficient in Qi the previous meridian is tonified. Qi flow from the lungs through the large intestine the stomach, the spleen and the heart to th liver. If the spleen is 'empty', the stomach meridian is tonified and the energy ther flows on from it to the spleen. A secondar result is that because the stomach is now fu of energy, the flow from the large intestin meridian is dammed back, so that there is an increase of energy in the large intestine.

Although taking the pulse is the mai method of diagnosis in acupuncture, ther are other signals which give the acupunc turist a clue to your physical condition. I you have a soft voice with a clear tone, thi suggests that you have a satisfactory flow o Qi. A strong, rough voice suggests that yo have too much flow of Qi, an excess of vita energy. A weak voice, lacking in resonance suggests a weak and unstable flow of Qi. Similarly, a pure and unblemished skin with a rosy tint points to a healthy flow o Qi, a congested and reddish skin to to much Qi, a thick, fatty skin, greyish i colour, to too little.

Interplay of Yang and Yin

Qi is the product of two great forces, o principles or polarities, called Yang and Yin These forces run through the whole universe and everything which exists depends on the interplay between them. 'Life', as Felix Mann puts it, 'exists as the result of tension between two extremes', and their different forms of combination with each other produce the five basic elements of which everything is made, the elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water. If they are thought of in terms of electricity, Yang is the positive charge and Yin the negative: if in terms of sex, Yang is male and Yin is female. The sun, light, strength, the right side, fire, dryness and many other qualities belong to Yang. Their opposites, the moon, darkness, weakness, the left side, water and wetness belong to Yin.

Western Views

Western interest in acupuncture first sprang up in France and Germany – in 1981 there were 1500 medically registered practitioners and 10 hospitals with acupuncture departments in France. Interest spread not only over the rest of Europe, but also to the United States. Following President Nixon's visit to China in the early 1970s some physicians in the United States began to study acupuncture to find out how its effects were achieved. During the President's visit, doctors travelling along with the party were invited to witness operations in which acupuncture was the only analgesic used – the word 'anaesthetic' is not accurate in this context.

Modern practitioners generally follow the major Chinese precepts, but with one or two modern refinements. For example some use needles connected to an electrical source, and pass a mild current along the needles. Conditions treated include allergies, migraine, arthritis, rheumatism, etc. It is also popular as a treatment for addiction to drugs, alcohol and tobacco, since it alleviates withdrawal symptoms and helps to reduce the feeling of anxiety.

The organs and meridians of the body re classified in terms of Yang and Yin. 'he heart, lungs, spleen, kidneys and liver elong to Yin, and a patient who has a weak eart will be said to be suffering from a eficiency of Yin. The intestines, stomach, ladder and gall bladder belong to Yang. Iealth and a satisfactory flow of Qi depend n a perfect balance between Yang and Yin ı the body.

When the Yang and Yin energies in a ıan's body are reasonably in balance, he is ealthy. If one becomes too strong or too 'eak, he is ill. If the Yang and Yin energies ecome separated altogether, he is dead. 'he acupuncturist stimulates the appro- riate points on the skin with needles, either) restore the flow of the weakened energy r to restrict the flow of the stronger energy, nd so bring the two energies back into alance. (For a similar idea in the West, ee MAGNETISM.)

It is said that seasonal changes affect the ow of energy. The Yang is more active than ne Yin in spring and summer: the reverse s the case in autumn and winter. The Yin nergy is stronger than the Yang at the time f the new moon.

)pposites and Balance

'he theory of Yang and Yin was systema- ized by a philosopher named Tsou Yen in he 4th century BC. But the belief that all ıings are made of opposites is not by any ıeans confined to China.

Early Greek thinkers saw that the niverse can be described in terms of opposites. Day gives way to night, summer to winter, heat to cold, youth to age. They also developed the theory that everything is made of four basic materials or elements, each combining two of the primary qualities, which are two pairs of opposites: hot and cold, dry and wet. The theory of the four elements and qualities was scarcely challenged until the 17th century. The idea that the world is made of opposites, with the consequent necessity for balancing and reconciling them harmoniously with each other, like Yang and Yin in the healthy body, was a basic doctrine of alchemy, also appears in astrology, and has remained one of the fundamental theories of occultism in the West (see OPPOSITES).

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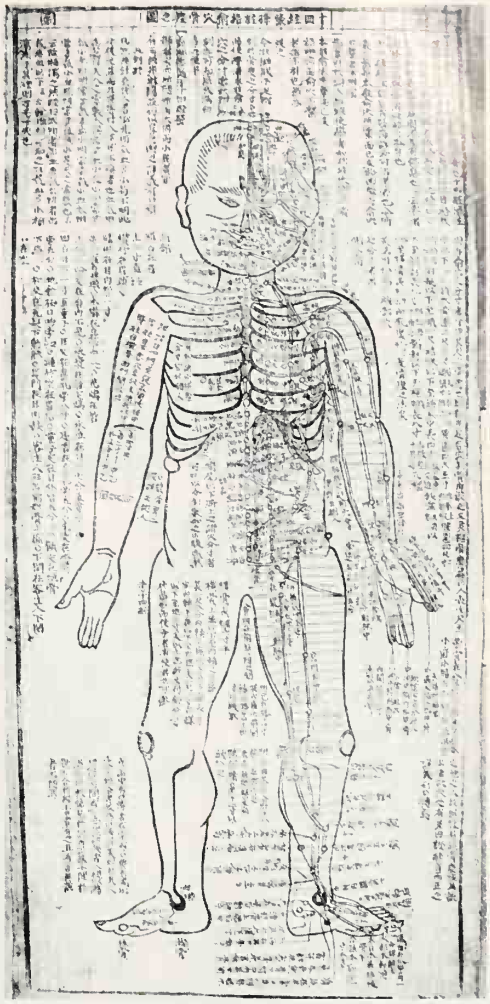
Far left This figure shows the points believed to control diseases of the heart and the sexual organs

Right Japanese chart, drawn in the 19th century, showing some of the points on the skin where acupuncturists insert needles to cure disease



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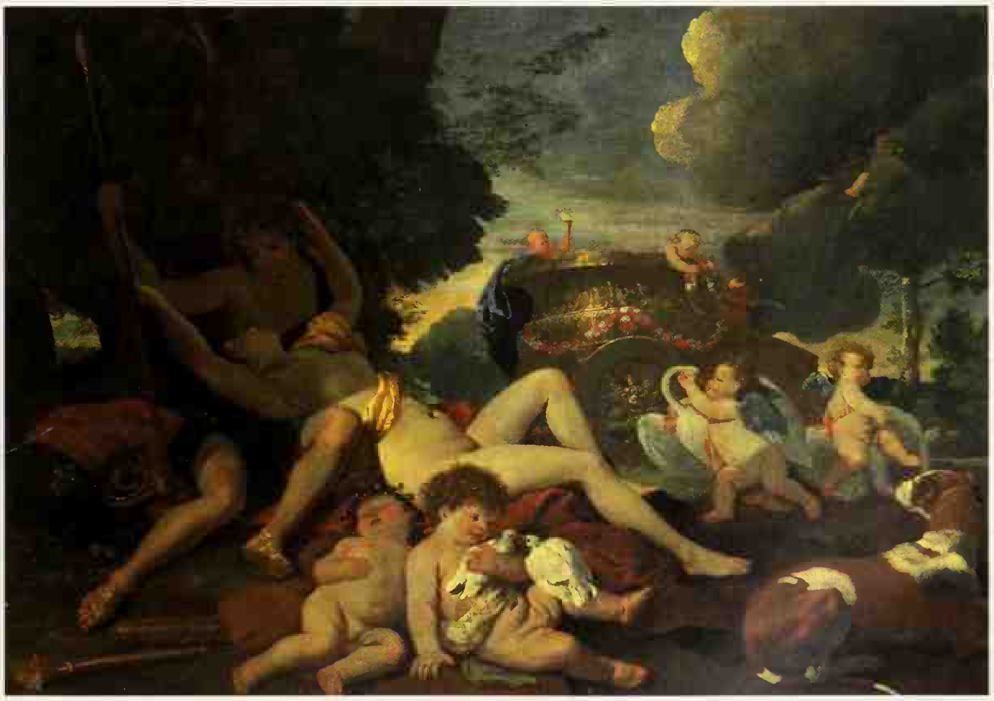
ADONIS

THAT THE NAME ADONIS is still a byword for masculine beauty is a legacy from Greek mythology. In the myth, Aphrodite, the alluring goddess of love, falls irresistibly in love with the handsome young Adonis, but there is tragedy in store. He is out hunting one day when he is gored and killed by a boar, sent by Ares, Aphrodite's jealous husband. According to various versions of the myth, the rose springs from the young god's dying blood, or the anemone springs up from the tears Aphrodite sheds for him – or all roses were white originally, but Aphrodite pricks herself on a thorn as she runs to help her lover and her blood falls on the roses and stains them red.

Behind this poetic tale lies the ancient theme of the mother goddess and her virile lover, the dying god who represents the vegetation which dies with every autumn and comes back to life with every spring. The Greek version tells only of the death of the god, but Adonis, whose name means 'lord', was originally a similar figure to Tammuz in Mesopotamia, the lover of the goddess Inanna or Ishtar, who rescued him from the realm of death and restored him to life (see TAMMUZ).

In another Greek story, which preserves more of the dying and rising theme, Adonis is the son of a king in Cyprus or Assyria by incest with his daughter, Myrrha. The gods turn Myrrha into a tree – the myrrh – and in due time a beautiful boy is born of the tree. Aphrodite entrusts him to Persephone, the queen of the underworld, to look after, but she is so taken with his extraordinary beauty that she refuses to let him go. Eventually Zeus decides that the youthful god is to spend part of the year below ground with Persephone, part with Aphrodite and part on Olympus. This tale is obviously linked with the death and rebirth of crops and vegetation, and recalls the myth of the rape of Persephone herself (see DEMETER).

(See also APHRODITE; DYING GOD.)



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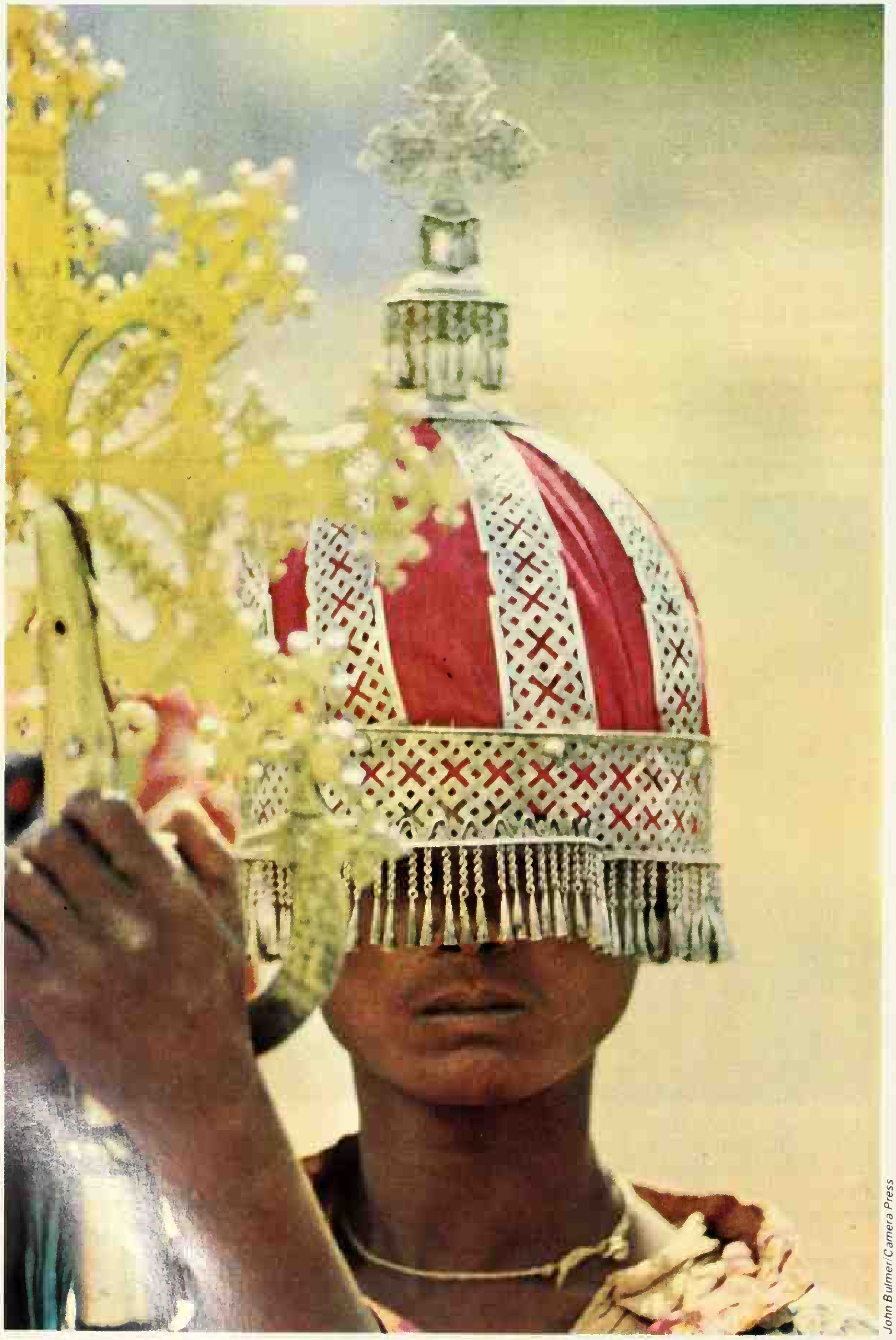
Aphrodite, Venus to the Romans, fell in love with the handsome Adonis: _Venus and Adonis_, by the 17th-century painter Nicolas Poussin

AFRICA

‘You are useless, you gods!’



John Bulmer/Camera Press

Africa is a land of many gods – indigenou
Christian, and Islamic – of spirits, magic, witc
craft and prophecy. This article provides th
background for later entries dealing with ind
vidual groups and customs

THE CONTINENT OF AFRICA contains maybe a
many as 6,000 different groups of people. S
complex and so variable are African lar
guages, cultures, and religions that anthr
pologists cannot yet agree on what sorts
generalizations can be made about the pe
ples of this area.

It follows that where there are so man
different sorts of peoples, there are man
gods and concepts of God, and many rel
gious sects with their own particular ri
uals, magical practices and tradition
myths. Some idea of the enormous diversit
involved can be gained by contrastin
Egyptian Copts, who maintain an ancier
form of Christianity, with Zimbabwea
spirit mediums who worked together wit
the ZANLA guerillas in helping to organiz
peasants in the anticolonialist struggl
against their white overlords. Both Copt
and spirit mediums are Africans, and bot
are archetypical, in their own ways,
African cultural groups and religiou
beliefs.

But it seems that, while admitting to th
existence of fantastic diversity, there ar
certain basic concepts which appear t
underly a great number of African religion
and these concepts, far from being th
‘mumbo-jumbo’ that most narrow-minde
Europeans used to consider them to b
have their own logic, and remain today, i
many parts of the continent, a powerfu
spiritual and social force. It is important t
remember, though, that, as in many reli
gions around the globe, many African faith
are more concerned with the problems
the individual in this world than with elab
rating a highly systematic and logicall
coherent set of beliefs. Rather than ponde
the nature of God, many people are mor
interested in the efficacy of their rituals an
their ability to alleviate suffering. The
want to know how their ancestors ma
assist them, rather than trouble themselve
about the status of a distant divinity.

Christian cross-bearer in procession during Queen Elizabeth II’s visit to the Sudan in 1965. There are over 70 million Christians in Africa

Stephanie Dinkins/Camera Press

Traditional Beliefs: Gods of Nature

To many Africans who still hold to their traditional beliefs, God in one of his many manifestations, or called by one of his many names (there are over 200 principal epithets ranging from 'the Everlasting One of the Forest' to 'He who roars so loud that the nations are struck with terror'), is an ever-present being; and his priests (who used to be dismissed as 'medicine-men' or 'witchdoctors' by foreigners) are usually recognized leaders of their communities.

Estimates give the number of non-Christians and non-Moslems in the continent as over 180 million, or more than half the total population. In earlier times, before Europeans gained a better idea of the real character of African traditional beliefs, these people were simply called 'heathens'. They were seen as 'poor benighted savages' who 'bowed down to wood and stone'. Then Europeans came to call them 'pagans' (from the Latin *paganus*, which originally meant a peasant or countryman). But this replacement term is still too pejorative and it is best to call those who have not converted to, or been brought up in, either Christianity or Islam 'holders of traditional, indigenous, or autochthonous beliefs'.

Most upholders of traditional practices believe in a polytheistic system in which a chief god presides over lesser deities, rather as a king ruled over his domain in ancient times. Most indigenous African religions have their Supreme Being, called by a hundred different names which vary from group to group. But no matter what the chief god is called, he is usually conceived of as the Maker of the World, the Master of Human Destiny, an omnipotent and omnipresent 'king of kings' and 'lord of lords'. And under the rule of the Supreme Being are all the lesser godlings, each with his or her special function.

One question which has long puzzled many European visitors is whether this Supreme Being, whatever his name, is an abstract idea – a sort of creative energy which animates and pervades the universe, but has no direct relationship with humans – or whether this god is a personal being, like the Jehovah of the Hebrews, or the 'Our Father' of the Christians. Though it is difficult to generalize about the nature of Supreme Beings in Africa, and even more difficult to understand satisfactorily these religious concepts and to translate them adequately in European languages, it does appear to be the case that an idea of some kind of Supreme Being is universal among those peoples of the continent still maintaining their traditional beliefs.

Figures outside a shrine of the god of thunder in western Nigeria

It is also the case that, to many European observers (who frequently have their own peculiar ideas about religion), worship of this Supreme Being often appears to be something of an almost lackadaisical affair. To these foreigners, brought up in a different cultural milieu, it often seems strange that the Creator of the Universe is regarded as somewhat indifferent to mere humans and their problems.

On the other hand, the lesser gods – the spirits of the earth and the ghosts of departed heroes – are usually thought to be much more sympathetic to the lot of humans. They can be flattered, wheedled, and even threatened. One African religious entreaty, which is not particularly unusual, states (in bowdlerized form), 'You are useless, you gods! You give us only trouble! You are a bunch of so-and-sos! What do we get from you? Nothing!'

Of course, this quasi-personal relationship with their divinities is not peculiar to upholders of African traditional beliefs. Roman Catholics also usually approach God via the intermediaries of the Virgin Mary or the Communion of Saints (whether the apostles, disciples, martyrs, or past members of the believers' local community who have been beatified and sanctified.) Similarly, in Islam, Mohammed and his fellow prophets (who include Jesus) are the intermediaries between humble humans and Almighty God.

Appreciation of the importance of nature is one of the more significant aspects of traditional African belief systems, and it is found in over a hundred different forms throughout the continent. We are familiar with the animal gods of Ancient Egypt: among those divinities, the crocodile and serpent were accorded special veneration, and they still are in some parts of Africa. Unlike most Europeans, who regard all snakes, whether poisonous or not, as repellent and to be exterminated, many Africans upholding their autochthonous religions are much more discriminating. Instead of killing snakes, they try to placate the 'snake spirit' itself.

For instance, members of several East and West African peoples strive to ensure, by their practices, that the 'python spirit' is not disturbed or given reason to act. In the mid-19th century, European travellers described the python 'temples' where specimens of these snakes were fed, watered, venerated and danced to. The python god was 'given' many wives who brought him food and water and made him comfortable with grass mats and a decorated house. In return for these labours, his spirit watched over the group and, via his intermediary, the local priest who consulted his omens, forewarned the community of dangers, accidents and the like. The penalty for killing a python was death by burning; in 1864 the explorer Sir Richard Burton saw a python-slayer burnt alive in his hut, from which he escaped only to be clubbed to death by priests.

Another significant aspect of traditional African religious systems is the common belief in some sort of life after death. In any case, in these communities of co-believers, no one is thought to die from natural causes. A person does not die 'naturally'. He or she ceases to live because they have been interfered with in some way – perhaps by human enemies, perhaps by evil spirits. Hence, when a person 'passes over', this does not mean that he or she has gone for good but, on the contrary, is believed to continue to take part in the communal life, now in his or her spirit form.

It would be incorrect to say, however, that followers of most traditional African religions 'worship' these ancestor spirits; rather they consult them, ask them for favours, or even argue with them. The ghosts of the deceased are frequently thought to be in some way present in a peculiarly personal belonging or frequented place – their hut, or the log they used to sit on in council meetings, or the tree beneath which they rested. Moreover, while Europeans' ideas of personal life after death are often comparatively vague, a good number of traditionally-minded Africans believe in some form of reincarnation, whereby it is thought that one of the ancestors can return from the spirit world to become an occasional part of the body of a newly born child.

Attempting to summarize the main tenets of African indigenous religions as far as possible given their variety, we can tentatively state that there appears to be a common underlying belief in a Supreme Being who made the world and who presides over the destiny of humankind; that this world is peopled both by living humans, by spirits, who are enshrined in natural phenomena, and by dead ancestors; that there is no 'final death' but an active after-life frequently coupled with an eventual return to earth.

The Coming of Islam

Moslems make up the second largest religious group in Africa. Their number is estimated at over 100,000,000, the majority in North Africa, which is almost totally Islamic.

The Arabs began their remarkably rapid conquest of Africa in the 7th century and had wiped out almost all ostensible traces of Christianity within a hundred years. Only the Coptic Churches of Egypt and Ethiopia survived – small communities of Christians who were to be effectively cut off from their brethren in the outside world for almost ten centuries.

Once the people of North Africa had been converted by the evangelizing armies, Arab traders and merchants began to penetrate regions which even the Carthaginians and Romans had not explored systematically. At the same time as they hunted for sources of ivory, gold, and slaves, they took with them, into places it had never been carried before, their new religion, an uncompromising faith fervently propounded which left subject peoples with little alternative: one was either a believer or an infidel. In practical terms, this often meant a choice of life or death. Millions of followers of traditional religions over large stretches of the continent chose to 'co-operate' with the determined and well-armed invaders, just as they were to 'co-operate' with the Portuguese Christians during the 17th and 18th centuries.

In some senses, conversion to Islam did not necessitate too fundamental a change in local ways of life. The Moslem concept of the One God dovetailed, to a certain extent, with locals' pre-existent beliefs in a Supreme Being. Moreover, Koranic law (as opposed to Christian morality) did not conflict with certain aspects of indigenous custom. For instance, it recognized the institution of slavery, which (as far as is known) was a long-established, integral component of many of these traditional societies. However, Moslems adapted its rules somewhat by regulating the treatment of slaves, concubinage, the status of the resulting children, and the rights of slaves as human beings, particularly if they chose to convert to the new religion.

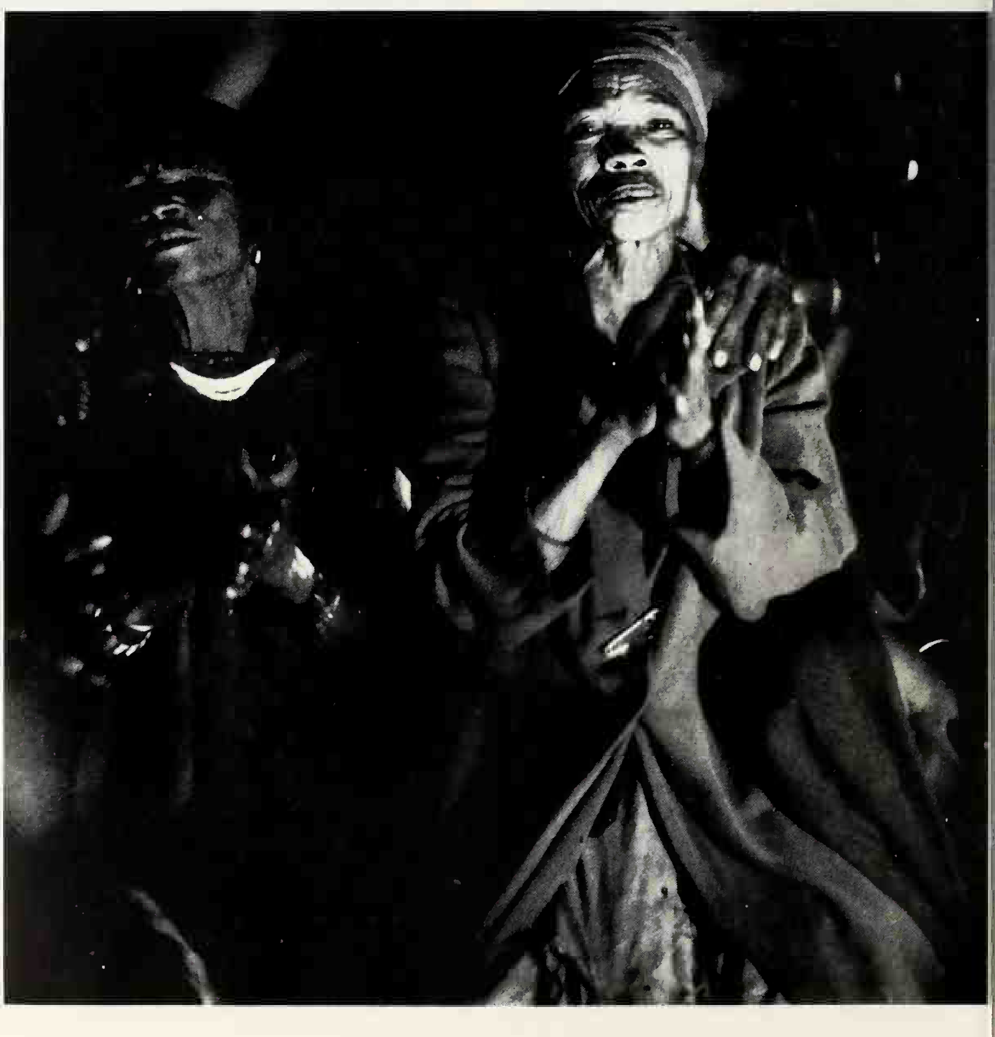
It is not difficult to imagine that those Africans who had suffered from cruel kings and chiefs might have welcomed the new laws. Before the arrival of the Arabs, some local groups treated captives from rival groups as lifelong serfs or, in some cases, put them to death. Once the new, Islamic lords of the land had established their dominion, they introduced a more humane relationship between masters and their slaves. These invaders also brought with them many new arts and crafts which they taught to their converts.

The results of this progressive, mass conversion (which continues to this day, albeit usually in a much milder form) are obvious throughout Moslem Africa today. Islam is a living, powerful force, one frequently with strong political overtones. Once converted to the faith, it is rare for locals to become apostates to Christianity, and most missionaries now openly admit that it is a waste of time to try to proselytise in predominantly Moslem countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Mauretania. Wherever Islam has been established for a few centuries, it gives the impression of having become a wholly integral part of the spiritual, social, and political life of its African converts and their descendants.

Christianity Returns

From about 100 to 600 AD the Christian Church in Africa was one of the great bulwarks of the faith, a church with millions of adherents, hundreds of bishops, and a long list of martyrs and leaders. This seemingly powerful organization covered much of northern Africa, from the mountains of Ethiopia to the shores of the Atlantic. Yet it was wiped out almost overnight (except for the Copts) by the conquest of the Arabs from the 7th century onwards. Non-Coptic Christianity was unable to obtain a new foothold on much of the African continent until almost a thousand years later.

Jurgen Schadeberg



Today the Christian Churches in Africa laim a total of over 70,000,000 members, of hom more than 30,000,000 are Roman atholics, approximately 20,000,000 belong o the Coptic and Eastern Churches, and he rest of whom are Protestants. These figres, however, should be treated with great aution, as it is always difficult to take an xact census of how many people believe in hich religion.

The first Europeans to attempt systematially to explore and to conquer parts of frica beyond its northern shores were the ortuguese, who made their first voyages outhwards during the mid-15th century. ne of the objectives of these *conquistadores* as, in their own words, 'the exaltation of he Catholic faith', and priests invariably ccompanied the armies and navies of these atest invaders. They had considerable sucess in terms of numbers, for we hear of one esuit priest on a short tour through Zaire n 1531 who baptized 1,500 locals, using a ose for the purpose. Of course, whether he ad explained satisfactorily the religious urpose of what he was doing is another atter. A number of local kings were also ersuaded to divorce all their many wives ave one – a change which no doubt had a reat impact on the social, political, and ecoomic organization of their realms.

Unfortunately for the missionaries, however, and for many of the locals themselves, uropean slave-traders were soon busy xporting millions of Africans overseas to he American continent. It is estimated that aybe as many as 100 million were shipped out as slaves between 1441, when the trade began with the arrival of the Portuguese, and 1888, when it was officially ended. Not surprisingly, some locals were puzzled by the contradiction of missionaries assuring them that they were the children of God while fellow whites – avaricious traders in human flesh – were working hard to enslave as many as possible. This great problem was summed up by one Jesuit priest who worked in Zaire: using the language (and perpetuating the attitudes) of his time, he wrote, 'The Negro saw, and compared with his rude intelligence, the teachings and the works. They did not coincide. While the Christian missionaries proclaimed the lofty dignity of the child of God by grace, the Christian trader merely counted one more piece for his gang.'

Nevertheless, committed proselytising Christians, such as Livingstone, continued with their work, and they have been followed by thousands of evangelists (an increasing number of them locals) who, in the last hundred or so years, have covered every part of the continent that they can. In the process Christian doctrine and ritual have frequently been adapted to fit local contexts. In some cases this has led to a considerable number of local Christians breaking away from the orthodox European sects to establish Churches of their own. There are now over 5,000 of these Churches, whose membership of over 7,000,000 is spread throughout much of the continent. Some of these Churches are syncretic, openly combining elements of Christian and traditional religious beliefs and practices.

The creation of these Churches must also be seen as an effort by locals to re-establish their religious autonomy, and to come out from under the priestly tutelage of foreign missionaries. They are ways for locals to assert their 'Africanism' in opposition to European missionaries' 'white' view of the world. The names of some of these new Churches clearly indicate their desired independence from their Western counterparts. Thus we have 'the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth and its leader the Prophet Simon Kimbangu' in Zaire; the 'Church of the Cherubim and Seraphim', and the 'Church of the Lord Aldura' in Nigeria; and the 'Christian Marching Church of Central Africa' which is centred in Zimbabwe (and see MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS).

Some of these Churches were developed to meet the perceived needs of local Christians which, they felt, were not being satisfied by the missions. For instance, the Aladura Churches, studied by the British anthropologist Jeremy Eades, were created by Nigerian Yorubas because orthodox Christianity, unlike traditional religions

Rhythmic drumming and dancing is used to induce states of trance in which spirits take possession of the performers, making a channel of communication between the normal and supernatural worlds

Far left **African drummer in trance**

Left **Two San women at a dance to cast out evil spirits**

Below **Samburu women in Kenya**

William Sargant

and the local form of Islam, did not offer healing techniques, protection against witches, and knowledge of the future. The faith of the missionaries seemed, in the eyes of some locals, to be more concerned with salvation in the next world than in solving their members' problems in this one. Thus the leading protagonists of the Aladura Churches are prophets who, unlike missionaries, act as charismatic healers and claim to be able to interpret dreams and visions.

If one is to judge from the rituals of these autonomous Churches, Christianity in much of central and southern Africa will soon have little resemblance to established religion as it is understood in the West.

Ritual Specialists

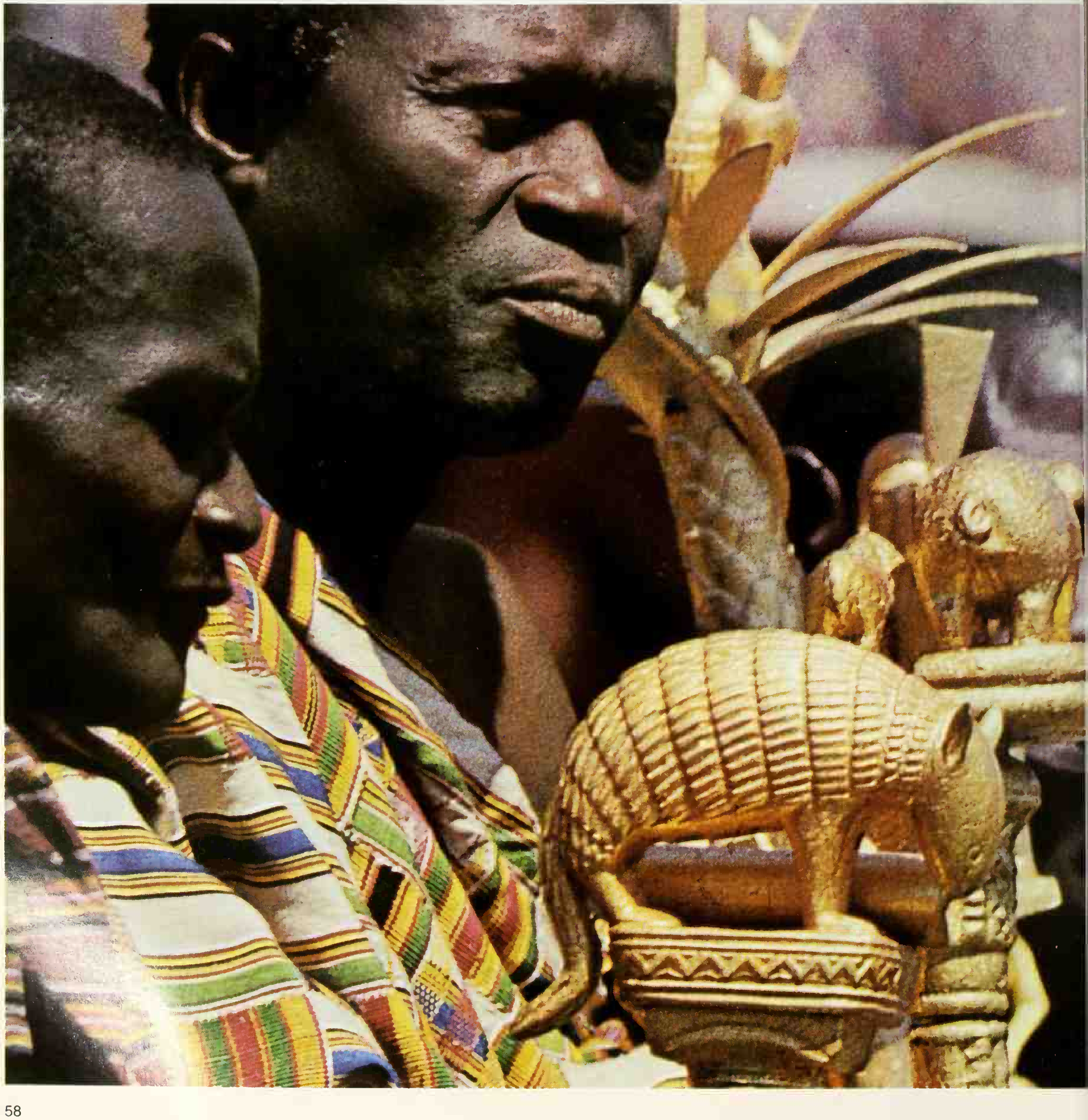
Until quite recently, ignorant Europeans used to portray indigenous ritual specialists as 'witch doctors', as bogeymen dressed in apparently absurd masks, feathers, and animal skins, who would leap about wildly to the accompaniment of loud drum rhythms. They were alleged to deal in what was called 'pure mumbo-jumbo' in order to hoodwink supposedly superstitious savages who were said to be under their spell. They were, in other words, caricatured as traditional confidence-tricksters who exploited their skills as performers so as to tak
advantage of their gullible audiences.

This European stereotype of local ways i
now recognized as a grave, self-intereste
misrepresentation which was used b
whites to justify their colonization c
Africans' lands, their labour-power, an
their souls. Many of those lampooned a
'witch doctors' were, and are, in fact indigenous medical practitioners, whose logica
systems of curative knowledge are frequently based on different premises fror
that of scientific Western medicine.

In some cases these medical practitioner
have developed cures, ones which Wester
doctors would recognize as effective, base
on their knowledge of the drugs containe
in certain plants. These indigenous practi

Below An anteater and an elephant appear on these ceremonial staffs held by the orators or spokesmen of native chiefs in Ghana

Facing page Young masked girls in Basutoland take part in an initiation ceremony



Eli Weinberg Camera Press

ioners have put together an impressive pharmacopoeia for day-to-day needs, such as emetics to induce vomiting in the case of poison; purgatives for ridding children of worms; sedatives for quietening hysterics; and potions for chest colds, headaches, whooping-cough, dysentery, snake bite, swellings and stings.

These practitioners also often deal with cases which Western doctors would find difficult to categorize and to diagnose. How, for example, would a British medical consultant deal with a person whom, it was stated, was suffering from attack by spirits? Some Western observers of the methods of indigenous practitioners argue that they sometimes rely on psychological techniques. But it is at the same time recognized by most Western doctors that they too have very frequently to use somewhat similar methods, and their rate of successful cures is often less than that of indigenous African practitioners.

Many followers of traditional beliefs would be ready to admit that Western medicines offer effective treatment for the curing of symptoms. But they would, at the same time, be quick to point out that these imported medicines are ineffective against the causes of the illness. If a person has fallen ill because he has been bewitched, a potion from a Western pharmaceutical company may resolve the outward manifestations of his ailment, but an indigenous practitioner would still need to be summoned in order to discover exactly who is bewitching the person; once having ascertained the identity of the witch, he can then work to resolve the situation.

Witchcraft has been grossly misunderstood by many Western observers. Far from being a strange collection of superstitious beliefs and practices, it is a logical mode of thought which serves the invaluable function of social control. For if, as is believed in many traditional religions, people may bewitch others without their being aware of doing so, then they must search their conscience, when a practitioner accuses them of witchcraft, for possible reasons as to why they might have something against the stricken person. Given this system of belief, it is quite likely that those who transgress the norms of local society most frequently will be those most often accused of witchcraft. Thus, if a person wishes to avoid such accusations, it is best for them to uphold the group's values and to observe their rules to the full. Similarly, if a dispute between two persons remains unresolved, then, should one of the two fall ill, the other may well stand accused of causing the illness; so it is best for all concerned that difficulties or important differences of opinion are settled to the satisfaction of the parties involved.

These local practitioners are also often required to predict the future, which they do frequently, employing a seemingly simple apparatus, such as placing a spider or crab in a container and divining the significance of the particular movements it makes. Their reputed ability to prophesy the future may be converted by some of them into political advantage. Among the Nuer of the southern Sudan prophets regularly arise, and the more successful of them act as conciliators and peacemakers, broadening and sustaining a moral community across ethnic and political divides.

Local practitioners may also be required to perform rainmaking ceremonies. Since these ceremonies essentially involve trying to placate a god or a spirit, or urging the being to bring rain, they are similar in form and aim to the special rituals performed in drought-stricken areas of Christian countries. In many parts of Spain, for example, during a particularly long dry period, the image of the patron saint of the village will be removed from the parish church and carried to the nearest river, where prayers will be said for the saint to intercede with God for rain on their behalf.

Medical practitioners in many groups may also be required to make special mixtures for their clients, for the purposes of warding off evil spirits or of giving a person protection from his or her enemies. The following, which comes from northern Nigeria, is a particularly elaborate example of one such formula:

> Cut off the head of a snake and in it plant the seed of the swamp dock. Bury the head in a grave which must be seven days old. Pour water on it for three consecutive nights. When the plant has grown to a height of three or four feet, go again to the graveyard and strip naked. Pull up the swamp dock and use it as a girdle. If anyone attempts to attack you, the girdle will become a snake that will bite your enemy.

The claims made for this sort of mixture seem directly comparable to those made in the West about substances such as 'royal Jelly', said to prolong life, or guarana, which is sold as having aphrodisiacal powers.

In some parts of Africa, men and women wear amulet pouches, containing items such as antelope horns and animal teeth, because they believe it will protect them or act as a charm on members of the opposite sex. Once again, this sort of behaviour is also found in the West: many Catholics carry small crucifixes or religious medals to protect themselves against misfortune or accident.

Indigenous Rites

African upholders of traditional religions seldom erect large, formal temples to their divinities. They tend to prefer natural or small shrines. These might contain a pool, prized stones, or a hut to house clay figures representing community gods and ancestors. To these shrines people bring their offerings of, say, eggs, cowrie shells and pieces of cloth. People may also sacrifice their sheep, goats, or cattle in order to communicate with the divine.

As in most world religions, believers in traditional African faiths mark, in a ritual manner, the birth of a new member of their community. Pregnant women must observe a number of special prohibitions, many to do with their diet, in order to ensure that their pregnancy and subsequent delivery are untroubled. In some areas, on the birth of a girl, the umbilical cord is cut with a hoe to ensure that she will be a good field worker; on the birth of a boy, the cord is cut with an arrow to ensure he will be a good hunter.

Again, as in many parts of the world, marriage is regarded more as a social contract, bringing together a man and a woman from different families or lineages, than a religious occasion to be marked ceremonially. It is important, above all, that the marriage proves to be stable and, in some areas, is not regarded as finally established until the birth of the first child. In some communities men are allowed to take more than one wife. Bringing more women into his homestead may increase the productive capacity of a man's domestic unit, but can at the same time lead to problems of its own, for a husband must ensure that his wives get on with one another. Traditionally, among the Tiv of Nigeria, if the wives of a man knew that he was intending to take another wife, they would try to choose her for him, to forestall the possibility of his selecting an inappropriate woman, one whose character or style of work would cause dissension.

Some African traditional religions do not make a sharp distinction between life and death. Death is seen as merely a change in status. The deceased remain a very real presence in the community, continuing to benefit the living by their wisdom and advice. Their souls return to that reservoir of power which we have called the Supreme Being. Their bodies pass as ghosts to that 'other world' which is common to many African traditional religions. According to the ideas of certain autochthonous religions, dead persons must, therefore, be provided for in death as in life. Hence they are buried

Barnaby's Picture Library

with solemn rites and interred with the necessities of existence – food, clothes, and cooking pots. In olden days kings and chiefs were also buried with their wives and slaves, who were sacrificed for the occasion.

Initiation Ceremonies

The purpose of initation rites is to promote unity, co-operation, and conformity to the life and law of the group, and to mark publicly the transition of the initiated from adolescence to adulthood. The most common form of these 'rites of passage', and one found in many parts of the continent, is circumcision.

The initiation is usually directed by village elders and administered by a ritual specialist. The youths to be initiated are often sent away from the village into a special camp, which they are not allowed to leave, maybe for as long as six months. During that time they are considered to be on probation and may be subjected to certain ordeals, being kept on a semi-starvation diet, being whipped for seemingly the most trivial of offences, being crowded into pens, or being forbidden to wash until the ordeal is terminated. Once circumcised, the boys may well swear blood brotherhood with one another. Those who undergo the initiation successfully emerge as full adult members of their group, with all the rights and privileges of the elders, including marriage.

A number of groups also practise a similar rite on girls, who are taken to a 'camp' where they may suffer clitoridectomy. Undergoing this operation allows them to be regarded as adults and to be entitled to marry and bear children. Indigenous organized opposition to the continuance of this practice is growing.

Secret Societies

Membership of a secret society often begins at the very outset of the initiation rite described above. From the moment the initiated member of the group returns from the camp to the village, he is often involved in secret activities of one kind or another for the rest of his life.

The principal secret societies, which may be so extensive that they spread beyond tribal and national boundaries, seem to be directly related to traditional beliefs in spirits, witchcraft, and the threat of cannibalism. For instance, members of the Leopard Societies of West Africa are feared because it is believed that they possess the power to transform themselves into the most dreaded animal of the forest. And, like the leopard, they are supposed to claw their victims to death and to devour parts of them. In colonial days, European administrators made attempts to root out these 'leopard men'. Not surprisingly, they were usually unsuccessful.

Probably the most widespread secret organizations are those of self-appointed vigilantes engaged in the perpetual battle against malevolent persons who employ supernatural means to perform their evil work. For example, in parts of Nigeria there is a secret society whose members, wearing tall conical headcloths to hide their identity, descend on villages at night to root out and hunt down these suspected evildoers.

Many governments in Africa acknowledge that they are powerless to suppress these secret societies – even if they wished to do so, for they also recognize that they are an integral part of social life and a powerful political force. And some politicians have been known to exploit the fear and strength of these societies for their own ends.

Good and Bad Magic

Some forms of magic are regarded as beneficent, others as maleficent. Beneficent magic is concerned with the problems of disease, both physical and mental, of accidents and misfortunes, and of natural disasters, such as drought. It is usually performed in the open, a public ceremony. Maleficent magic is reportedly performed privately at night.

Some anthropologists have argued very convincingly that maleficent magic does not exist. What do exist are beliefs about the existence of this form of magic, and the perpetuation of these beliefs acts as a form of social control, keeping people in line.

Beliefs in the existence of witchcraft rely on the perceived need to be able to explain the inexplicable, and to explain it as the action of a person. Once that person has been identified, then efforts can be made to redress the situation. Europeans may regard a disastrous rainstorm at a critical stage of the agricultural cycle simply as something deeply unfortunate, over which they have no control. Believers in witchcraft, however, may regard that rain as the product of a particular person's acts and so seek to resolve matters by counteracting his influence and by preventing him from continuing (see WEATHER MAGIC).

A futher example of the desire to explain what would seem to some as inexplicable might be the case of a granary hut collapsing on top of a man. It could be that the hut collapsed because termites had eaten through the pillar against which the man had been leaning. But that does not explain why it fell down at that particular time on that particular man. Secular whites might wish to call such an event 'an unfortunate incident' or 'an unlucky coincidence'. Believers in witchcraft see it as nothing of the sort.

Among certain communities it is believed that the majority of witches are men; in other communities, it is thought that the majority of them are women. In some groups, youthfulness is no protection against being accused of witchcraft, for in these communities it is thought that even the young may be witches.

Beliefs about the supposed powers and practices of witches vary from group to group. In some groups it is believed that witches practise their activities only at night, at which time they leave their bodies and fly off, sometimes as a ball of fire, sometimes as a night bird, to the tops of trees or a secret grove, where they convene with fellow witches and indulge in nocturnal orgies. These orgies are said to be cannibalistic: the witches feed on human flesh and are apparently especially partial to the tender meat of babies and young children. This supposed flesh-eating seems to be regarded by those who believe in its existence as a rite in which the soul of the victim is devoured, leading to the slow withering away of the victim's actual body.

As one might imagine, even if these nocturnal flesh-eating feasts do not actually take place, belief in their occurrence is sufficient for them to be used as the explanation why, for instance, someone otherwise apparently healthy has suddenly fallen ill.

Since ideas about witchcraft, as a type of explanation, form a logical and closed mode of thought which, once its premises have been accepted, cannot logically be disproved, it is not surprising that people's belief in its existence and its efficacy have survived. Indeed belief in it is said to thrive among the relatively recently established African

ır left Ewe man of Ghana in trance cuts mself without loss of blood, to indicate the wer of the war god who has possessed him
ft Ubangi 'medicine-man' beating a sick girl to ive out demons. Her back is daubed with rbs and warm water
elow In Africa, as in many other parts of the orld, the craft of the smith is associated with ligion and magic. Other members of the tribe e not allowed to see the tools of this smith, no is also a priest, in Cameroon, west Africa

ourgeois of ex-colonial states: in other ords, among the very class of people whom uropean administrators thought would be e first to give up such beliefs.

It is mainly for these reasons that urbanation, Western education and technologal change have failed to alter the convicons of many about the persistence of itchcraft. Christian missionaries confess at these beliefs constitute the greatest ostacle to genuine conversion. It seems, erhaps, to be one that they will never overme to their satisfaction.

nderlying Myths

ke almost all faiths, traditional African ligions have their own collections of myths explain the creation of the world and of ankind. Some, moreover, have myths simar to the Christian.

Among some traditional African commuties, the Supreme Being is said to have ade man and woman from clay. These two ortals lived for a time in a paradisiacal ate, from which they were expelled for mmitting something akin to the Christian otion of 'original sin'. For example, one gend from one part of Nigeria blames the oman for having annoyed the Supreme eing by striking the sky with her pounding ick. Another, from a region in Zaire, says at her continued nagging became so intolable that the Supreme Being lowered her own from heaven in a basket.

Whatever the reason given by these yths for the expulsion from paradise, the nsequence is usually the same: the origal humans are alienated from their creor, who henceforth retires into his own omain. There, in some of these myths, he ows older and, it seems, more maudlin. or according to some, his old eyes dribble ith tears, which become the rain that falls oon the earth. According to others, he oends a great deal of time quarrelling with s wife. Claps of thunder are his shouting.

frican Religions Today

espite the great variety of peoples living ithin this continent, it is true that religion Africa – whether it be traditional, neoaditional, syncretic, Islamic, or Christian remains as vibrant and as socially imporınt as ever. Established faiths may become npopular, new churches arise, novel forms religiosity wax and wane, but religion, in eneral, retains its central position in the ves of the peoples who live there.

Perhaps one generalization about Africa at can be made with any certainty is that ere is widespread (though, unfortunately, ot universal) tolerance of religious plualism.

JEREMY MacCLANCY

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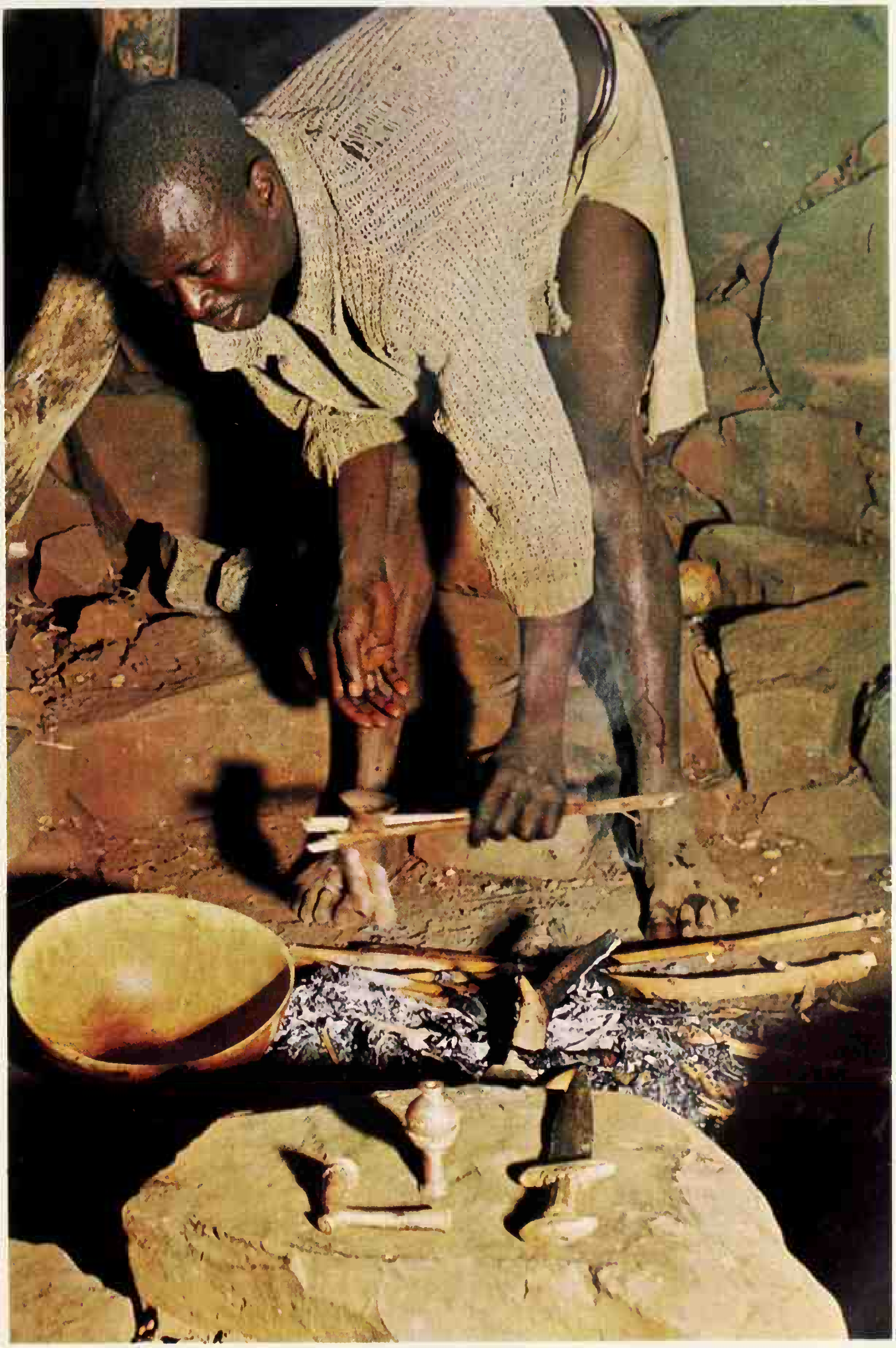
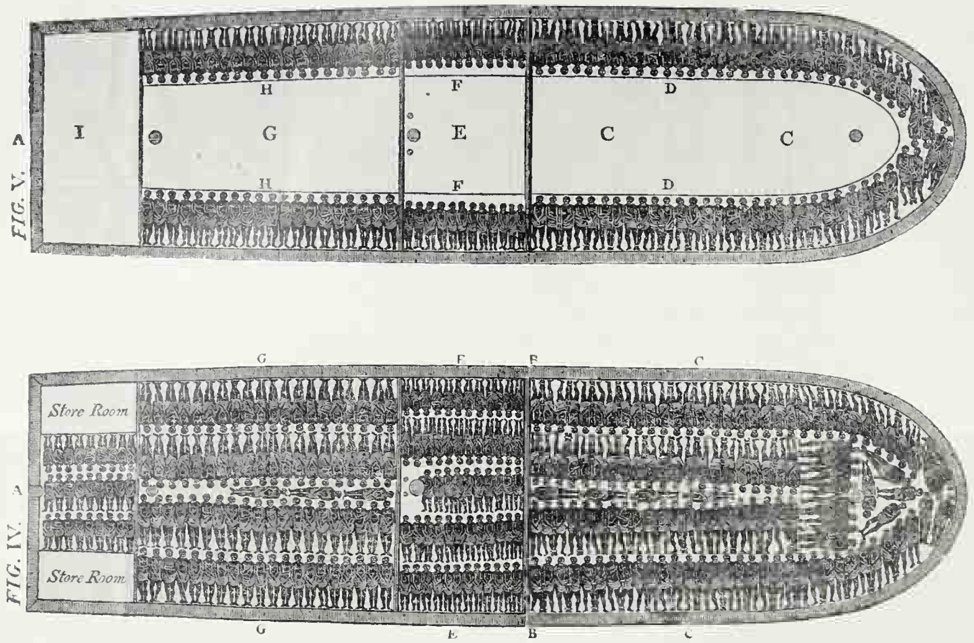


Gianni Roghi/Camera Press



The horror and the legacy. Africans shipped to the Americas aboard the slave vessels could bring nothing with them but their menta baggage, a store of pithy sayings and riddles songs and legends, and beliefs about witches and evil spirits

Left **How the slaves were stowed aboard the slaver *Brookes*, out of Liverpool in 1791**

Right **The Ku Klux Klan adopted their robes and spooky headgear to frighten blacks into believing that they were evil spirits. Dissolved in 1871, the Klan was revived by W.J.Simmons who raised the first fiery cross outside Atlanta in 1916**

Mary Evans Picture Library

The Africans who were transported to the Americas as slaves took their mental baggage across the Atlantic with them just as all other groups of immigrants did. In the Africans' case, it was all they were allowed to take. Transplanted to the New World, African traditions blended with European folk ways and beliefs to nurture a rich crop of Afro-American folklore

AFRO-AMERICAN LORE

THE FIRST AFRICAN SLAVES in North America were landed in Virginia in 1619. The importation was stopped in 1808 and by the 1850s the total slave population was about 4 million. Black culture in the United States was originally oral. Tales of the slavery time and of emancipation after the Civil War were passed on to subsequent generations by word of mouth and, although these narratives might be based solidly on fact, they acquired a mythic quality over time as they were handed on down the generations. Also handed on were pithy sayings, riddles, songs, beliefs about ghosts, witches and evil spirits, and stories of mythical and legendary heroes, told of an evening on the plantation after the day's work was done.

Probably still the best-known, in white circles, of the hero-tales are the Uncle Remus stories retold by a white author, Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908). The first of them, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings*, came out in 1880. Harris grew up in Georgia, where he spent most of his life as a newspaperman, and the Uncle Remus stories made him famous throughout the English-speaking world.

The central character of the tales is Brer Rabbit (see BRER RABBIT), an engaging trickster figure who owes something to the West African spider-trickster Ananse (see ANANSE). Stories of his exploits were told to white children in the South by their black nurses and servants. Running through them is the theme of the physically weak and defenceless rabbit getting the better of the much bigger and stronger animals, whose natural prey he is, by his superior intelligence and craftiness. The theme has naturally a strong appeal for children, who find themselves weak and downtrodden in an adult world, but it had exactly the same attraction for blacks, who found themselves weak and oppressed in the white world.

Brer Rabbit's ruthlessness and readiness to lie and cheat, inherited from African tricksters imbued with the jungle's basic law – the survival of the fittest – again appealed to the downtrodden on the plantation or in the nursery. A cycle of Afro-American stories developed about Old Master and his slave John, engaged in a constant battle of wits, in which John is the trickster in human form.

Whispers of Voodoo

In South America and parts of the West Indies, the amalgamation of African religion with Christianity created vigorous new religions in the form of Voodoo and the Afro-Christian cults of Brazil, in which African deities have blended with the revered figures of the Christian faith and take possession of the faithful in trance (see NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS; SOUTH AMERICA; VOODOO). Little of this occurred in the US, though in the 1850s Frederick Law Olmsted saw blacks becoming possessed by the Holy Spirit or the Devil at Christian services in the South. He described frenzied religious services with shouting and jumping, and excited singing and dancing in the slave quarters afterwards. The emotional excitement of revivalist religion in America has survived ever since, among both whites and blacks (see HOLY ROLLERS), but the religion is entirely Christian.

There is much talk of Voodoo in the cosmopolitan city of New Orleans, with its blend of French, African and Caribbean influences, but voodoo there usually turns out to mean not a religious cult, but the practice of magic and fortune telling. In the 19th century the famous so-called 'voodoo queen' of New Orleans, Marie Laveau, sold charms and potions and cast spells against her clients' enemies, and her clientele was said to include the best white families.

Today the city's Historic Voodoo Museum advertizes a Voodoo Ritual Swamp Tour 'Witness an authentic Ceremony! Experience the full mystery of the swamp at dusk After an eight mile trip through the bayous you arrive at the ritual site. The flambeaux are lit, the drums beat, an authentic Voodoo Ritual takes place for you, followed by a Cajun feast. An unforgettable occasion!' The 'authentic' rite is plainly got up for tourists, and although there are 'voodoo priestesses who advertize their services in New Orleans today, they are fortune tellers and peddlers of spells and charms rather than cultists.

The Conjure Doctor

That magic flourished on the plantations there is no doubt. Some of those shipped across the Atlantic were African priests and medicine-men, specialists in the sacred, and they were naturally respected and consulted by their fellow slaves – and sometimes by the white masters as well. The medicine-man developed into the plantation 'conjure doctor' or 'trick doctor' or 'hoodooer', the 'rootworker' or 'two-head', who understood the ways of powerful spirits and who knew how to heal disease, provide protection against the magic of enemies and cast spells for good luck or success in life and love.

Some white plantation owners found the conjure doctor's presence essential for the smooth running of the estate, others deplored his influence as an affront to Christian values. On the Negro side, some Africans converted to Christianity rejected the conjure doctor as an ally of Satan, but others believed that he drew his power not from the Devil, but from God. In 1822 a black Methodist leader in Charleston, Denmark Vesey, planned a slave rebellion. It is said that the spiritual 'Go down, Moses' was first sung at one of Vesey's meetings, and he depicted the projected rising in terms of Old Testament prophecy and God's

Gamma/Frank Spooner Pictures

nterventions to rescue the Chosen People from the oppression of their enemies, but at his side was a conjure doctor known as Gullah Jack. The rising was betrayed before t began and Vesey and his associates were executed.

A typical conjure doctor of later times in New Orleans was a Roman Catholic octoroon named Anatol Pierre, who had a temple in a private room and initiated enquirers into magical rituals for summoning up spirits, including the Great Moccasin, Kangaroo and the Death spirit. He claimed a distant if dubious kinship with the famous Marie Laveau and, like any traditional 'cunning man' of European tradition, he had a flourishing practice among the poor. His customers came to him to look into the future, ward off disease, bad luck and spite, find things lost or stolen. One customer paid for a death ritual against an enemy which involved writing the man's name on a slip of paper, wrapping it in a beef heart and dropping the heart into a jar of vinegar. The altar was draped in black, black candles were lit and a doll representing the enemy was placed in a toy coffin. The spirit of Death was summoned to follow the man and the doll was eventually buried in a grave with a black cat and a black chicken. Whether by coincidence or not, the man duly died.

The Terror By Night

Tales of ghosts and supernatural evil flourished among blacks, as they did among whites at similar social levels. People preferred not to walk near cemeteries at night and strange things might be seen by moonlight. There were sinister ghosts called plat-eyes, the spirits of men untimely murdered, feared by animals and human beings alike. There is a story about a woman on a plantation sending her two small sons with a mule to fetch the week's supplies from the store. They collected the groceries and returned home, the mule walking through dense, scary woods as the moon showed eerily in the sky. Then the mule became uneasy and, when they came to a spot where a man had been mysteriously killed years before, he put his ears back and stood stock still. They whacked him with a stick, but he would not go on. Then they felt a gust of warm air and a little white cloud crossed the road in front of them. It smelled of sulphur. The mule reared back and the boys and the groceries fell off his back. They did not try to pick them up, but jumped onto the animal's back as he careered off homewards as fast as his legs could carry him. When they got home he fell down in the yard and lay there panting for breath. Everyone recognized that the white cloud was the spirit of the murdered man and would have smothered them to death if it could.

The dead were the object of fears and superstitions, many of which were picked up from whites. Never answer the first time your name is called, according to the proverbial wisdom, for it may be a ghost or spirit calling and if you answer it, you will soon die. They never call a second time.

The spirit of a dead person is dangerous immediately after death and the clock and the mirror in the death chamber must be covered over so that the spirit cannot see them, otherwise the clock will never work again and the mirror will show no more reflections. Wearing black for mourning stops the ghost from bothering you. It was just as bad luck in Georgia as it was in England or Scotland to meet a funeral procession head on. It was necessary to turn round and look in the direction the procession was going.

Witches were feared, too. They liked to 'ride' their victims in the night, leaving them exhausted in the morning with their hair tangled or their face scratched. When someone talked or called out in his sleep, it meant a witch was after him, and nightmare and witch were the same thing.

The Ku Klux Klan adopted their white robes and spooky headgear to frighten blacks into thinking they were evil ghosts and spirits. Years later in the 1930s, a Southern black remembered how, when he was a child, a gang of them arrived on horseback at the slave cabins and the leader demanded a bucket of water. It was quickly brought to him and he drank it down and two more after it. 'Then he just wipe his mouth and say: "Lordy, that sure was good. It was the first drink of water I's had since I was killed at the battle of Shiloh".' The trick with the water was worked by pouring it into a concealed leather bag inside the man's robe.

Love and Music

There were plenty of love charms and minor superstitions, too, of the kind familiar in European tradition. To make someone love you, for instance, place some of his or her hair inside your hat or in the pocket nearest your heart. Tuesday is a lucky day for weddings. Do not step over someone lying down, or any illness he is suffering will be transferred to you. If you kill a snake and leave it lying on its back it will bring rain.

In music the mingling of African and European elements fathered a new and vigorous Afro-American musical tradition, beginning with spirituals in the religious sphere and with work songs and ragtime in the secular. The first collection of plantation spirituals, *Slave Songs of the United States*, came out in 1867 and aroused tremendous interest. Five years later Fisk University formed a choir, the Jubilee Singers, to tour the country performing spirituals and raising money for the institution, and other black universities followed their example. Since those days songs like 'Swing Low Sweet Chariot', 'He's Got the Whole World in His Hand' or 'When the Saints Go Marching In' have carried Afro-American music to the four corners of the earth and the Black American influence on this century's music has been vital and profound.

Heroes and Villains

Just as white American society created folk heroes of wildly exaggerated physical attributes (see UNITED STATES OF AMERICA), so did black. The legendary John Henry, for instance, who pitted his giant strength against the white man's steam drill and 'died with his hammer in his hand', was a real man who was transformed into a mythical titan. Or there was the formidable Annie Christmas, who weighed more than 250 pounds, stood 6ft 8in and boasted a moustache and a voice like a foghorn. She worked as a Mississippi longshoreman, and could carry a barrel of flour under each of her massive arms and another barrel on her head. Annie could outdrink any man in the South. She had twelve black sons, all born at once and each seven feet tall. When she died, her body was placed in a coal-black coffin and taken to the wharf in a coal-black hearse, drawn by six coal-black horses. Her coal-black sons marched with her, six on each side, in coal-black suits. At the wharf by moonlight the coffin was placed in a coal-black barge and the twelve sons climbed aboard and floated out on the water and were never seen again.

As white folk tradition made heroes of real-life criminals and outlaws, so too did black. An example is Railroad Bill, real name Morris Slater, who robbed freight trains in the South for three years before he was finally ambushed and killed by law officers in 1896. He would break open crates of canned food and other goods on board and throw his booty onto the track, later returning to pick it up and sell it to local blacks. His ability to elude capture inspired the belief that he was a powerful conjure man,who could change shape into a fox or a sheep or a dog whenever he wished. According to legend he was a dead shot and a bold adventurer:

Railroad Bill, he went down Souf,
Shot all de teef out o' de constable's mouf,
Wa'n't he bad, wa'n't he bad, wa'n't he bad.

Many other black badmen became heroes of folk tradition – Stackolee, John Hardy, Harry Duncan, George 'Devil' Winston and numerous others – and many of them, too, were credited with supernatural abilities. Stackolee, who according to legend came into the world with a caul over his face and a full mouthful of teeth, later sold his soul to the Devil in return for magic powers and wore a magic Stetson hat with which his power was bound up. In their defiance of the law and the odds against them, their guile and their ruthless violence, the badmen are in the same mould as the trickster-hero who lives by the principle of the survival of the fittest. They too reflect Black American experience of long years of oppression.

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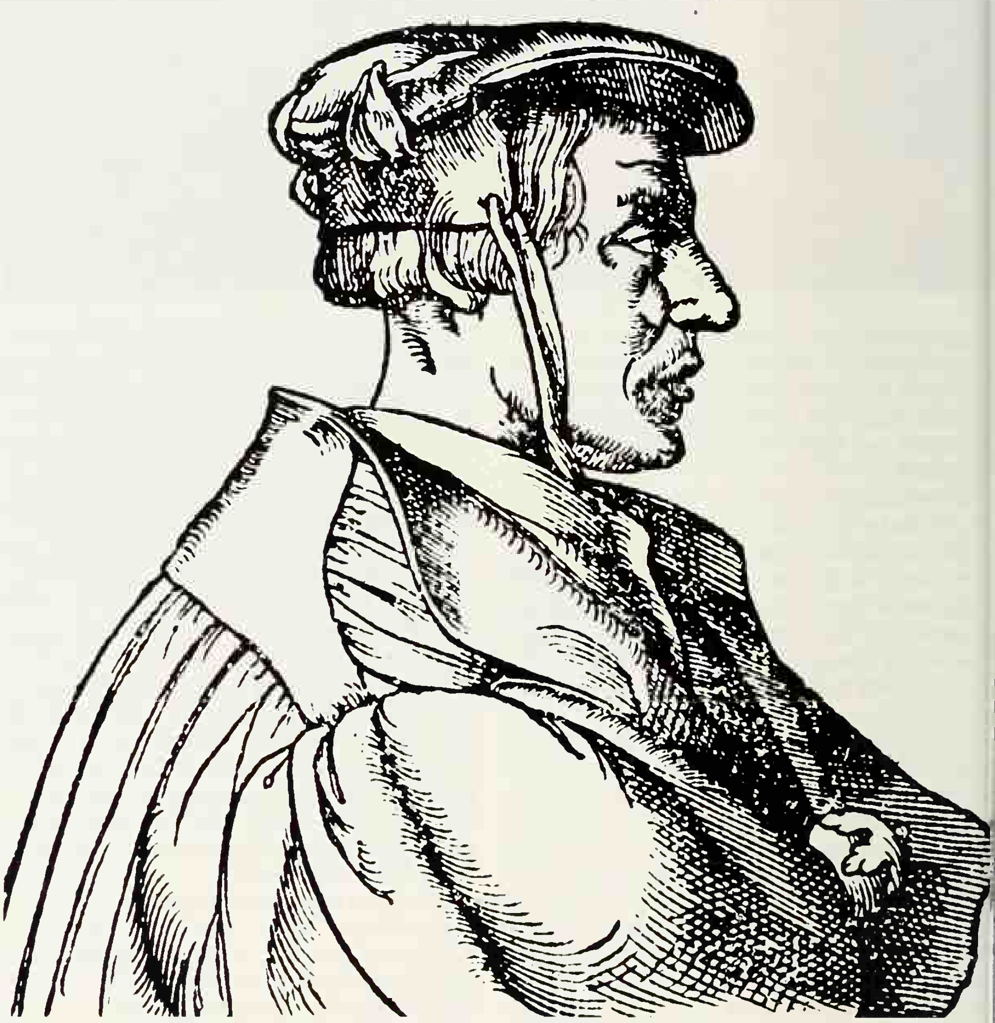


Agrippa gained a reputation in his own day as a great sorcerer who had dealings with demons but his real importance comes from his book Occult Philosophy, *in which he defended magic as the supreme path to the understanding of the world and God*

AGRIPPA

HEINRICH CORNELIUS AGRIPPA von Nettesheim was born at Cologne in 1486 and died in 1535, almost certainly at Grenoble. His books on magic and occultism were widely known and he was both famous and infamous at the courts and universities of western Europe. His real name was Heinrich Cornelis. After the fashion of the time, he latinized Cornelis into Cornelius and awarded himself the bogus noble title of Agrippa von Nettesheim, from the Roman founder of Cologne and the name of a place near Cologne.

Undisciplined, unstable and erratically brilliant, Agrippa was often forced to live by his wits and played at different times the roles of occult scholar and alchemist, faith healer and demonologist, court astrologer, theologian, lawyer and doctor, historian, town orator, financial adviser and secret political agent. He worked now for the Pope and now for his rival the Emperor, switching sides as opportunity offered. He founded secret societies whose members he was not above exploiting. He mixed with royalty at one moment, only to find himself in prison for debt the next.

Agrippa moved restlessly about Europe until his enemies caught him at Grenoble, imprisoned and tortured him, and left him so broken that he only survived his release a matter of weeks. Much of his career is shrouded in mystery and even before his death he had become the centre of stories in which he figured as a master black magician. Goethe drew on some of these stories for the title character of his play *Faust*.

Agrippa's best-known work, *De Occulta Philosophia* (Occult Philosophy) was published in three volumes in 1531 but had been written much earlier, in 1510, possibly during a visit to England. It is based on ideas current at the time: that man is a miniature copy of God, made 'in the image of God' as the Bible says; that the whole universe, taken together, is God; and that man is therefore a miniature copy of the universe. The universe (the macrocosm or 'great world') is built on the model of man (the microcosm or 'small world') and so, like man, it has a soul. (See also MACROCOSM.)

Agrippa says that everything which exists has a 'soul' or spiritual component, part of the total world soul, which shows itself in the magical properties of herbs, metals, stones, animals and other phenomena of Nature.

For instance, the magnet attracts iron, whoever wears the stone called heliotrope becomes invisible, and a sure contraceptive for a woman is to drink mule's urine every month because mules are sterile.

Agrippa considers the relationship between matter and spirit in the light various arts and sciences, including musi geometry and, especially important, astr logy. Then he turns to the human sou and its relationship to the body, as reveale by necromancy – the summoning up of th spirits of the dead – and in the religions all ages.

Agrippa builds up a system of th universe in which everything is part of great spiritual whole, which is God. Mag is the way of investigating this system bu magic is only for the initiated few, for me like Agrippa himself, members – as most them were, in fact – of secret societies. H does not press the point fully home but h conclusion that man 'containeth in himse all things which are in God' is well in line wit

elow left **Portrait of Agrippa from the frontis-ece of his *Occult Philosophy,* in which he efended magic**

ght **Agrippa's reputation as a magician sted long after his death in 1535. In the id-19th century he is 'the great Agrippa', ho punishes three naughty boys by plunging em into his inkwell, in Heinrich Hoffmann's uesome *Struwwelpeter,* which remained andard children's reading until quite recently**

Man and God

Agrippa argues that man contains the whole world and God in himself:

> Therefore man . . . hath in himself All that is contained in the greater world, so that there remaineth nothing which is not found even truly and really in man himself, and all these things do perform the same duties in him as in the great world: There are in him the four Elements with the most true properties of their nature, and in him an ethereal body, the Chariot of the soul, in proportion corresponding to the Heaven: There are in him the vegetative life of Plants, the senses of animals, of celestial spirits, the Angelical reason and the Divine understanding . . . man, being made another world, doth comprehend all the parts thereof in himself but also doth receive and contain even God himself . . . Therefore man is the most express Image of God, seeing man containeth in himself all things which are in God . . . Whosoever therefore shall know himself, shall know all things in himself; especially, he shall know God, according to whose Image he was made.

Occult Philosophy
(17th century translation)

e magical theory that the magician can ake himself God and wield the supreme ower of God in the universe.

Agrippa's other main work forms a com-ete contrast to his first one. Written in 526, at a time when his fortunes were at a w ebb, and published three years later. *e incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et tium,* (The Uncertainty and Vanity of the ciences and Arts) maintains that on alance the arts and sciences are harmful man. Through an encyclopedic review of l the sciences and arts known to him, hich provides a mine of information and olds up a fascinating mirror to the cul-re of the times, Agrippa contrasts the isillusion which all this knowledge brings ith the spiritual strength gained through e only sure and beneficial thing on which an can rely – the divinely revealed word God.

Agrippa is rarely an original thinker and is philosophy is a compilation of ideas om many sources. He ransacked the works writers ancient and modern for ideas hich he adapted in a tremendous display erudition to his own magical system. But econd-hand though much of his occult lore , it is shot through with moments of enuine poetic utterance.

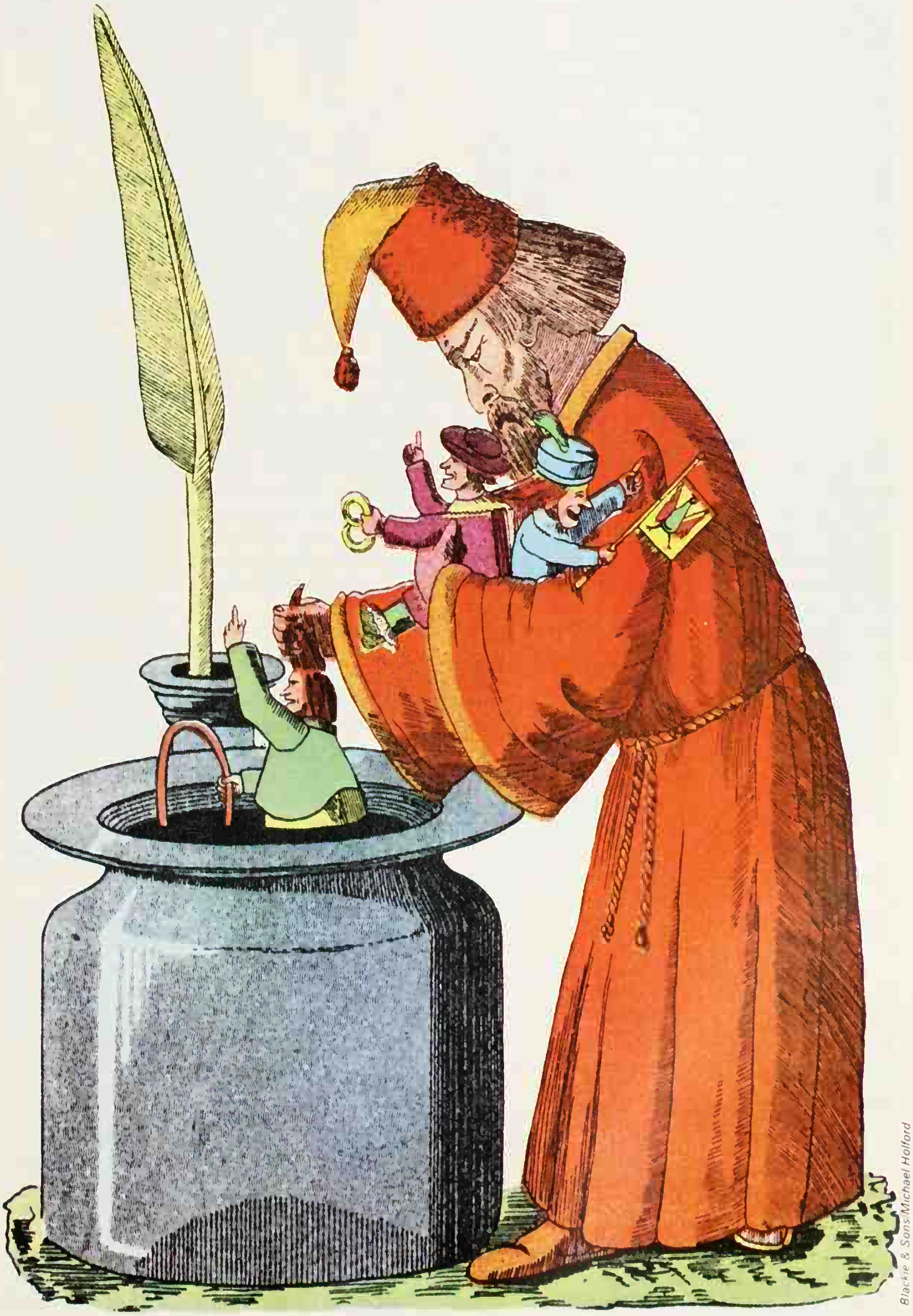
Of his contemporaries, Paracelsus was r the greater genius but Agrippa, with is virtues and vices, provides the best irror to the social and intellectual fer-ent of his time.

D. G. DYER

Agrippa as Black Magician

One of the many stories told about Agrippa was that he went out one day, leaving the key of a secret room in the house with his wife. She foolishly lent it to the lodger, a student, who went into the room and found a huge book of spells, which he began to read. After a while he looked up and found a demon standing in front of him, asking why it had been summoned. He gaped at it in horror and the demon strangled him.

Agrippa returned and, fearing a charge of murder, made the demon restore the student to life for a few hours. The young man was seen walking in the street but when the demon's magic wore off, he collapsed.



Blackie & Sons/Michael Holford

'I have rent the sky. I have befouled it . . . I have befouled the waters, pierced open the earth' is the triumphal cry of Ahriman, the power of evil in the old Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism. But his triumph brings its own defeat when evil has eaten up everything it can and has nothing left to destroy but itself.

AHRIMAN

FOR 13 CENTURIES Iran has been a Moslem country but before the Moslem conquest the state religion was Zoroastrianism. Ahriman is the Zoroastrian Devil (not the Moslem one, whose name is Shaitan, more familiar to us as Satan). We first hear of Ahriman in the 7th century BC when he plays a significant part in the *Gathas*, or 'Songs', of Zoroaster, the prophet of ancient Iran and the founder of Zoroastrianism.

Zoroastrianism is generally held to be a classical form of religious dualism; that is to say, it holds that the universe is not the creation of one god or principle but of two – a holy power and an evil one. Some religions identify evil with matter, with what Christians call 'the flesh'; but in Zoroastrianism matter, far from being evil, is the creation of the holy god and is therefore in itself entirely good. Evil is a *spiritual* power, negative and destructive: it is called the 'Lie' and is the principle of disruption and death, the adversary of Truth.

In the *Gathas* there is the basic dualism between Truth and the Lie: these are principles which exist in opposition to each other for all time. Of the origin of the Lie nothing is said. Truth, however, is seen as an aspect of the One True God, or Ahura Mazdah, 'the Wise Lord': twice it is called his 'Son'. If the 'Lie' is the principle of evil, Ahriman is its personification. He is not yet the eternal Adversary of the One God but he *is* the eternal Adversary of an entity called the 'Holy Spirit'. From the beginning the two Spirits face each other in implacable hostility. But evidently there was a beginning, for the Holy Spirit, like God the Son in Christian theology, was born of the Father and it appears that he was also the twin brother of the Evil Spirit:

> In the beginning those two spirits who are the well-endowed (?) twins were known as the one good and the other evil, in thought, word and deed. Between them the wise chose rightly, not so the fools. And when these Spirits met they established in the beginning life and death that in the end the followers of the Lie should meet with the worst existence, but the followers of Truth with the Best Mind. Of these two Spirits he who was of the Lie chose to do the worst things; but the Most Holy Spirit, clothed in rugged heaven, (chose) Truth as did (all) who sought with zeal to do the pleasure of the Wise Lord by (doing) good works. Between the two the demons did not choose rightly; for as they deliberated delusion overcame them so that they chose the most Evil Mind. Then did they, with one accord, rush headlong unto Fury that they might thereby extinguish the existence of mortal men.

Alinari

Above **Lion-headed god of Mithraism (a religion which rivalled Christianity). He is believed to be identical with Ahriman, 'the most evil mind', ruler of death and destruction: now in the Vatican Museum**

Right **Ohrmazd, the principle of truth and light, riding on horseback, tramples on Ahriman's snake-covered head. Zoroastrians believed that the perpetual struggle between the two would end in the triumph of Ohrmazd. On the left a Persian king tramples an enemy. From a rock relief at Naqsh-i-Rustem, Iran**

From this passage two facts emerge. First, the two Spirits are twins and since Ahura Mazdah, the Wise Lord, is the father of the Holier, it follows that he must also be the father of the Evil One. Secondly the Evil Spirit, though he is 'of the Lie' must *choose* evil: he is not evil absolutely but becomes evil by choice. Once the choice is made, however, he is no more capable of change than is Satan in the Christian tradition: he is forever committed to the Lie.

Declaration of War

Zoroastrianism is above all the religion of free will. Not only is Ahriman, the Evil Spirit, evil by choice and the Holy Spirit holy by choice, but the One Supreme God, Ahura Mazdah, has also to commit himself – has to choose between Truth and the Lie.

Ahura Mazdah chooses Truth. 'Holy and good Right-mindedness do we choose: let it be ours.' This is a declaration of war on the Lie and those who have chosen the Lie. On both sides this is an irrevocable decision and the battle must be fought to the finish.

In the *Gathas*, then, which are now generally admitted to be the work of the prophet Zoroaster himself, the supreme God aligns himself with the Holy Spirit agains the power of the Lie. The Evil Spirit, on the other hand, chooses to lead the power of the Lie against the Holy Spirit and therefore against the Supreme God. But thoug he is the sworn enemy of the Holy Spirit, h is also his twin and must therefore also b the son of his father, the 'Wise Lord'. Would it not, then, be more true to say that the Zoroastrianism of Zoroaster is not a dualism at all but a form of monotheism (belie in one god), at least in the sense that the Wise Lord is the First Cause of all things'. In later times the Zoroastrians became divided on this issue.

A purely dualist solution was favoured by the fact that in the course of time the Holy Spirit was simply identified with the Wise Lord. The name Ahura Mazdah took on its later form Ohrmazd, and Ohrmazd and Ahriman then appear as independen principles eternally separate and distinct eternally opposed. This is the form of Zoroastrianism that we meet with in the Sassanian period, from the 2nd to the 7th centuries AD, when the Persian Empire was revived under the house of Sasan and Zoroastrianism became the official religion of the Empire.

By this time Ahriman had grown in stature: he had become an independen monarch who held undisputed sway in his own kingdom of darkness and death. But the myth of the two eternal twins lingered on because the problem of evil is at the very centre of Zoroastrianism.

Our experience of life seems to show that if God is all-powerful, he cannot be absolutely good – because he lets evil exist; and conversely, if he is absolutely good, he cannot be all-powerful – because he evidently cannot prevent evil. A cut-and-dried dualism absolves God from any responsibility for evil, however indirect, but he necessarily pays for his goodness at the price of his omnipotence. But if the old legend of the primordial twins was retained, and since the Wise Lord and the Holy Spirit were now identified in the single person of Ohrmazd, could it not be that these twin poles of good and evil themselves derived their being from a neutral principle which was the original Unity?

Such a principle some of the Zoroastrian theologians thought they had found in Infinite Time, which was also Infinite Space, and which they called by its ancient name Zurvan. The myth was therefore modified to suit this new theology. It has totally disappeared from the Zoroastrian texts of the period but it is preserved in Christian and other sources and is certainly authentic. The myth which has come down to us is a popular presentation of a far more subtle theological position, which seeks at all costs to preserve both the original Unity and the absolute goodness of God.

Zurvan and the Birth of Evil

The myth says that the great god Zurvan existed before there was anything else. He offered sacrifice so that he might have a son but after a long time he began to wonder whether his hopes were vain. As soon as this thought occurred to him, Ohrmazd and hriman were conceived – Ohrmazd because Zurvan's sacrifice and Ahriman because his doubt. Zurvan decided that whichever them came to him first, he would make ng.

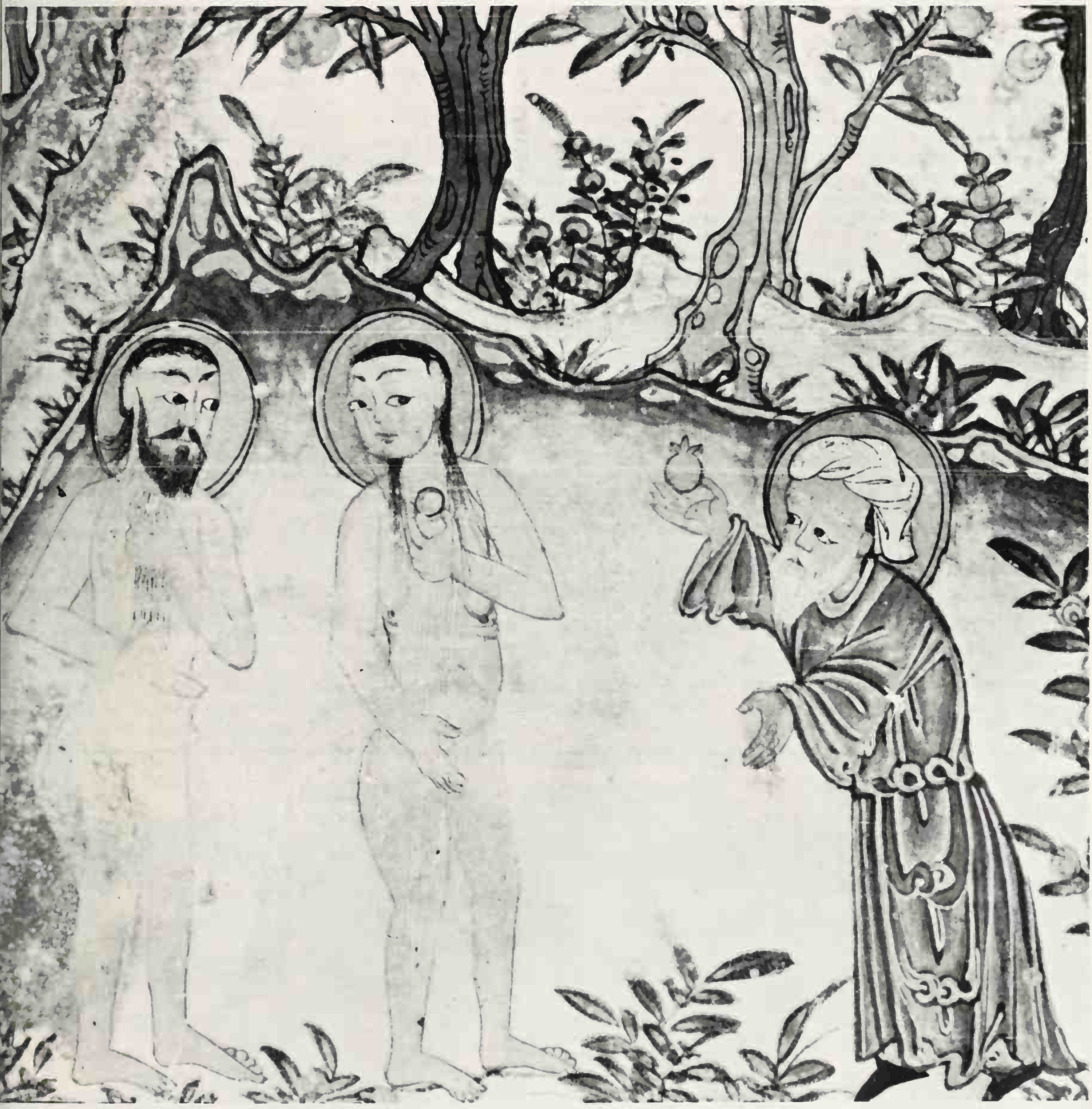
When Ahriman heard this he ripped the womb open, emerged and advanced towards his father. Zurvan, seeing him, asked 'who are you?' And he replied: 'I am your son, Ohrmazd.' And Zurvan said: 'My son is light and fragrant, but you are dark and stinking.' And he wept most bitterly. And as they were talking together, Ohrmazd was born in his turn, light and fragrant; and Zurvan, seeing him, knew that it was his son Ohrmazd for whom he had offered sacrifice . . . And he said (to him): 'Up till now it is I who have offered sacrifice for you; from now you shall offer sacrifice for me.' But . . . Ahriman drew near and said to him; 'Did you not vow that whichever of your sons should come to you first, to him you would give the Kingdom?' And Zurvan said to him: 'O false and wicked one, the Kingdom shall be granted you for nine thousand years, but Ohrmazd I have made a King above you, and after nine thousand years he will reign and do everything according to his good pleasure.' And Ohrmazd created the heavens and the earth and all things that are beautiful and good; but Ahriman created the demons and all that is evil and perverse. Ohrmazd created riches, Ahriman poverty.

Ahriman is born of Zurvan's doubt and rules the world, but only for nine thousand years.

This partial solution of the problem of evil which made the Evil One 'prince of this world', if only for a relatively short time, did not in the end satisfy the majority of Zoroastrians. The myth of the primordial twins was set aside and the universe was neatly divided into two separate halves, light and darkness, good and evil.

In the beginning, then, 'the Light was above and the darkness beneath; and between them was the void – Ohrmazd in the light and Ahriman in the darkness. Ohrmazd knew of the existence of Ahriman and of his

Ahriman in an Islamic miniature, as an old man who offers the fatal fruit to the first human beings. The Zoroastrians borrowed the story of Adam and Eve from the Bible



University Library, Edinburgh

coming to do battle: Ahriman did not know of the existence and light of Ohrmazd.' He soon found out. Roaming around in his dismal kingdom, he reached the upper confines of his realm and saw a ray of light. He longed to get hold of it and to destroy it. Ohrmazd in his goodness offered him peace, which the Evil One summarily rejected, and leapt forward to attack the light. Ohrmazd repelled him, 'laid him low by the pure power of the Law and hurled him back into the darkness.' There he lay unconscious for over three thousand years.

Having foiled this first onslaught, Ohrmazd realized that he must create a bastion between himself and Ahriman, the eternal aggressor. For this purpose he first created a spiritual universe which is an 'ideal' model of the material universe, then the material world itself.

The ideal world was to remain forever free from the pestilential attacks of Ahriman, and at its summit were the souls of the human race. When Ahriman's attack on the material world took place, it was Ohrmazd's plan that these souls should acquire bodies and go to live in the world 'to do battle with Ahriman and the Lie'. But Ohrmazd demands the free co-operation of man, he does not and will not violate the freedom of man's will.

> He took counsel with the consciousness and pre-existent souls of men and infused omniscient wisdom into them saying: 'Which seems more profitable to you, whether that I should fashion you forth in material form and that you should strive incarnate with the Lie and destroy it, and that we should resurrect you at the end, whole and immortal, and re-create you in material form, and that you should eternally be immortal, unageing, and without enemies; or that you should eternally be preserved from the Aggressor?' And the pre-existent souls of men saw by that omniscient wisdom that they would suffer evil from the Lie and Ahriman in the material world, but because at the end they would be resurrected free from the enmity of the Aggressor, whole and immortal for ever and ever, they agreed to go into the material world.

For the defeat and destruction of Ahriman, then, man's co-operation is essential. Man must become mortal and accept bodily existence in order in the end to annihilate the force of destruction, death and all evil.

Gayomart & the Lone-Created Bull

Once the souls have consented to this, Ohrmazd creates the material world: he creates the sky, water, plants, the animals in the shape of the 'lone-created Bull', and finally the first man, Gayomart 'shining like the sun'. All is now in readiness and Ahriman prepares his attack. It is devastatingly successful. Each of Ohrmazd's creations he defiles and corrupts; he slays the Bull and mortally wounds Gayomart. His triumph seems to be complete and he cries out in savage exultation:

> Perfect is my victory; for I have rent the sky, I have befouled it with murk and darkness, I have made it my stronghold. I have befouled the waters, pierced open the earth and befouled it with darkness. I have dried up the plants and brought death to the Bull, sickness to Gayomart . . . I have seized the Kingdom. On the side of Ohrmazd none remains to do battle except only man; and man isolated and alone, what can he do?

But Gayomart's seed had fallen into the earth as he died and from his seed sprang up a rhubarb plant which split in two to form the first human couple: the human race was therefore saved to continue the long arduous battle against evil which it had already freely accepted.

Moreover, the material universe was bounded by the sky which Ahriman had rent open, forgetting that it was made of 'shining metal that is the substance of steel'. He has entered into his Kingdom but the Kingdom is his prison.

This does not matter so long as he and the vices he has brought in his train can prey upon the creatures of Ohrmazd; but in the end evil which is of its nature destructive, finding that Ohrmazd's creation is slowly slipping from its grasp, will be forced to disrupt and destroy itself.

Ahriman and the demons in the world are like wild beasts that have broken into a garden, but once they have wreaked all the destruction they can, they find that they have been trapped. They make frantic efforts to get out and in doing so they use their own strength against themselves and ensure their own destruction.

The End of the Lie

Ahriman's end comes about when Ohrmazd's creation has become so spiritualized as to escape his power. Pandemonium then breaks out; demon attacks demon, each destroying the other until only Ahriman and Az, the demon of death, greed and lust, are left.

Az turns on Ahriman and threatens to swallow him, and Ahriman is forced to appeal to his eternal enemy to deliver him from his former ally. Ohrmazd will not relent. The Spirit of Obedience destroys the threatening demon Az and Ohrmazd himself lays Ahriman low.

Does this mean that Ahriman is finally annihilated? According to popular mythology, yes: 'he is dragged outside the sky and has his head cut off.' But according to more sophisticated accounts, he cannot be annihilated because he is the *substance* of evil and, according to the particular brand of philosophy the Zoroastrians had adopted, a substance by definition cannot be destroyed.

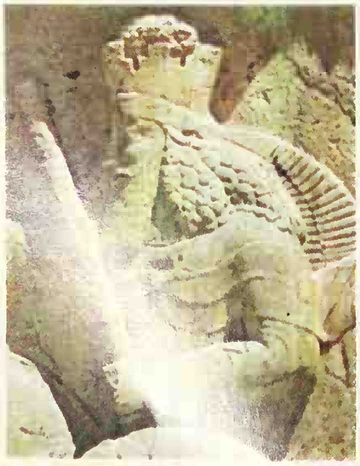
The technical term used means literally to 'put out of action': 'he is thrown out of the sky through the hole by which he rushed in; and at that hole he is laid low and knocked unconscious so that he will never arise again . . . He will be forever powerless and, as it were, slain and henceforth neither he nor his creation will exist.' With his destruction a new heaven and a new earth are created, all men are resurrected, and those who were confined to hell are released from their torments, and all enjoy perpetual bliss for evermore in the company of Ohrmazd, the Wise Lord.

While he still exists as a conscious being, Ahriman is intensely active in this world. He is the Adversary of both God and man, the Destroyer, the author of death, a 'liar and a deceiver'. His aim is to deceive men as to the true nature of God, and so to bring them to hate Ohrmazd and to love himself. By these means he entices them into hell of which he is the overlord. In fact he is not the equal of Ohrmazd and never really stands a chance because he 'comes to know things too late'. So he is defeated as much by his own stupidity as by Ohrmazd's wisdom and power.

(See also DEVIL; OHRMAZD; MANICHEANS; ZOROASTRIANISM; ZURVAN.)

R. C. ZAEHNER

FURTHER READING: R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1961).



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Ahura Mazdah

A name of Ohrmazd, the good god of Zoroastrian religion, twin brother and opponent of the evil god Ahriman, who will eventually be overthrown by Ohrmazd after ruling the world for nine thousand years.
See AHRIMAN; OHRMAZD.

Roger Wood, London

Air

Connected with 'life' and 'soul' in mythology, mysticism and magic, because living creatures cannot survive without it: connected with Maat, the Egyptian goddess of truth, and with the card called the Fool in the Tarot pack: control of breathing is an important technique in yoga.
See BREATH.

Rampant sexuality, torrents of filthy language and extraordinary bodily contortions are nowadays associated with hysteria and other mental disorders. In the 17th century they were put down to possession by devils

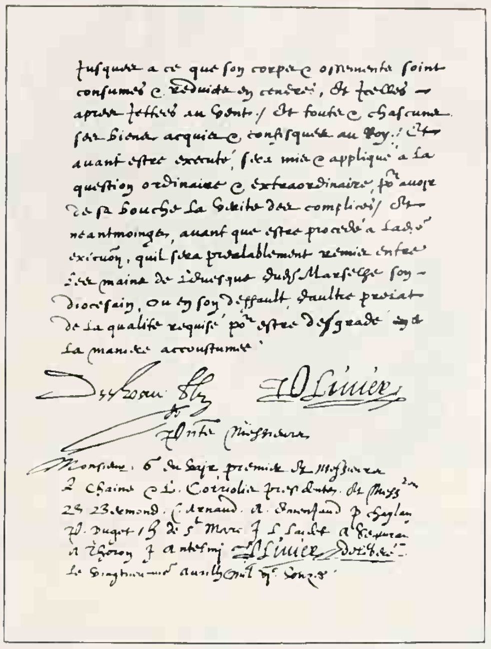
AIX-EN-PROVENCE NUNS

IN THE FIRST 25 years of the 17th century the witchcraft delusion in France reached its high peak of intensity. A characteristic feature of the period was the prevalence of cases of demonic possession, involving priests and nuns. Demons were believed to be attacking the human race, obsessing the minds and controlling the bodies of victims into whom they had entered through the bodily orifices. In a reign of terror against every form of demonism, the inquisitors attempted to withstand what they believed to be a mass assault levelled at Church and society by the Devil, working through his agents – sorcerers and witches.

In the year 1609, at Aix-en-Provence in southern France, Madeleine de Demandolx de la Palud began to show signs of diabolic invasion. In 1605 she had been admitted to the Ursuline convent at Aix but had been returned to the care of her parents, a well-established Provençal family, to recover from the attacks of depression which afflicted her when away from home. Unfortunately she fell under the influence of Father Louis Gaufridi, parish priest of Accoules in Marseilles and a friend of the family.

Like so many clerics of that age Gaufridi was far from ascetic in his way of life. Several women were known to be infatuated with him, and his services as a confessor were in particular demand among the wives of the citizens. The disparity between the ages of Gaufridi and Madeleine (he was 34, she was 13) was apparently no barrier to the priest. His visits became ever more frequent and he was often closeted alone with her for long periods. Inevitably perhaps, she fell violently in love with him.

The story soon reached the ears of Catherine de Gaumer, head of the Ursuline convent at Marseilles, who warned the child's mother of the dangers to which her daughter was exposed, and a hint was conveyed to the priest that he should cease his attentions at once. In the following year Madeleine was admitted to the Ursuline convent at Marseilles under the direct control of Mother de Gaumer, to whom she revealed the full story of her relations with Gaufridi, which she said involved sexual intercourse since her childhood.



Jusques a ce que son corps & ossements soient
consumés & reduicts en cendres, et icelles
apres jettées au vent. Et toutes & chascuns
ses biens acquis & confisqués au Roy. Et
avant estre executé, sera mis & appliqué a la
question ordinaire & extraordinaire, pour avoir
de sa bouche la verité de ses complices. Et
neantmoings, avant que estre procedé a lad.
execution, quil sera prealablement remis entre
les mains de levesque dud. Marseille son
diocesain, ou en son deffault, daultre prelat
de la qualité requise pour estre desgradé en
la maniere accoustumée.

Above Last page of the judgement against Louis Gaufridi, with the signatures of those who condemned him for bewitching the nuns of Aix. He was brutally tortured before being dragged on a hurdle through the streets and strangled. His body was then burned

Below Convents were often the scene of psychological disturbances which were put down to the action of devils. From *La Réligieuse*, a film about a young girl who is forced into a convent against her will, and becomes the prey of demonic forces

Hordes of Demons

It was considered wise to move Madeleine out of danger of any further association with the priest by returning her to the more distant convent at Aix. The affair might have been forgotten had not Madeleine, two years later at the age of 16, suddenly fallen victim to what in contemporary eyes was unmistakably demonic possession. Her body became contorted, hordes of demons surrounded her and in a fit of rage she destroyed a crucifix. Such states of mind were not uncommon in convents and were usually cleared up very quickly by exorcism. This case proved more obstinate however, as the Jesuit Father Romillon discovered when his attempts to drive out the possessing demons failed.

Exorcism was a complex ritual, requiring infinite patience and skill. It involved a violent verbal assault on the devil in possession, as well as prayers and the liberal use of holy water. The patient was often made to breathe in noxious fumes, to accelerate the departure of the devil from so inhospitable a habitation.

Father Gaufridi was questioned about his sexual relations with Madeleine and insisted that his association with her had been proper in every respect. Further exorcisms, however, brought from the mouth of the possessed girl damning accusations that Gaufridi was a devil worshipper and had copulated with her since she was 13.

The situation at the convent was now getting out of hand, for three more nuns were possessed by devils; and by the end of the year the number had risen to eight. The most severely afflicted of these was Sister Louise Capeau, whose ravings and contortions were, if anything, even more hideous than Madeleine's.

Reduced to desperation, Father Romillon sought the aid of one of the most famous witch-hunters of the age, the Grand Inquisitor Sebastian Michaelis. The Flemish exorcist, Father Domptius, was also called in and managed to produce from the mouth of Louise the harsh, blaspheming howls of three terrifying devils, by name Gresil, Sonnillon and Vérin, each of whom was high in the hierarchy of hell.

It was Vérin who accused Gaufridi of causing Madeleine's condition, revealing to the amazed exorcist that no less than 6666 ferocious evil spirits were now in possession of her body, the most eminent being the devils Leviathan, Baalberith, Asmodeus, Astaroth and the mighty Beelzebub, second only in authority and infamy to Lucifer himself.

Cannibalism and Perversion

Father Gaufridi was summoned from his parish and ordered to exorcize Louise Capeau. No expert in this highly specialized treatment, he failed miserably and heard

himself denounced as a sorcerer and cannibal by the very demons he was struggling to expel. Typical of their denunciations was: 'Louis Gaufridi outside makes believe that he is a saint; however, inside he is full of iniquity. He feigns to abstain from flesh; nevertheless he makes himself drunk with the flesh of little children... whom he has eaten, the others whom he has suffocated and afterwards dug up all cry before God for vengeance upon crimes so execrable.' Gaufridi's reply to the dangerous charge of sorcery was not only curious but also damning, for he said: 'If I were a witch I would certainly give my soul to a thousand devils.' This statement was regarded as a confession of guilt by the inquisitors, who flung Gaufridi into prison.

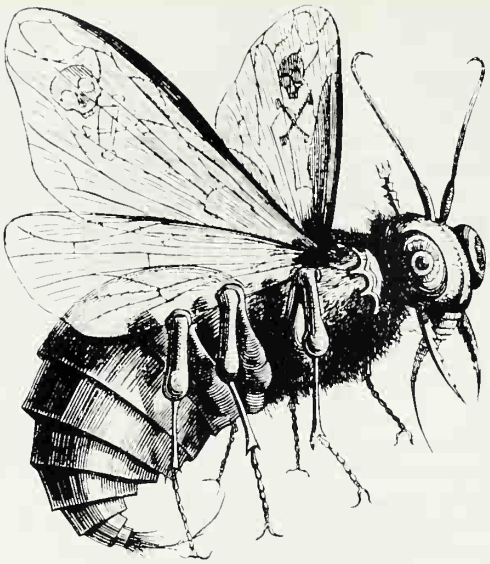
Meanwhile, the possessed nun Louise attempted to outdo Madeleine by loudly insisting that Gaufridi had committed every imaginable sexual perversion. The alarmed authorities immediately ordered the priest's rooms to be searched for magical objects or books, but were surprised and disappointed to discover nothing of an incriminating nature. Learning from those who knew him that he was well regarded in his parish, they released him and let him return there. Here he clamoured for vindication of his good name, and demanded that his accusers be punished.

Throughout this period Madeleine never ceased to be wracked in body and spirit by the tormenting devils, and the convent was in complete disarray as the result of her ravings, obscenities and accusations against Gaufridi. Overwhelmed by the 6666 furious demons within her, she sometimes neighed like a horse, while her bones creaked and groaned like a tree bending before a storm.

The case of the possessed nuns of Aix was now rocking France. On the one side stood Gaufridi, insisting upon vindication, and on the other the Grand Inquisitor Michaelis, victor of a thousand battles with Satan, determined to bring Gaufridi to trial. The result was predictable. In 1611 the case came before a court in Aix and, although he could not at first have realized it, the priest's doom was sealed.

The behaviour in court of the two nuns, Madeleine and Louise, was by 17th-century standards typical of an advanced state of diabolical possession. Madeleine in particular was often demented, shrieking, crying and alternating between violent denunciations of Gaufridi as a devil worshipper and wizard, and the complete retraction of the same accusations. Then she would return to the charge of cannibalism. 'Much he cares for your salt fish or your eggs. He eats good smoking flesh of little children which is brought to him invisibly from the synagogue' (the meeting of the witches). Then she would expose her passion for him by pleading for a single word of kindness from his lips. Sometimes she would be overcome by lust and it became painfully obvious to those in court that the girl was experiencing an orgasm before their eyes, her convulsions 'representing the sexual act, with violent movements of the lower part of her body'.

She twice attempted suicide. During the course of the trial it was discovered that she possessed 'Devil's marks' on her body, the secret brands by which Satan recognized his own. These marks later vanished in a mysterious fashion.



Beelzebub, Lord of the Flies, one of the demons which possessed Madeleine de Demandolx; from the Dictionnaire Infernal

The Pact with Satan

Gaufridi was brought into court shattered by the mental anguish and physical tortures he had suffered in prison. His body had been shaved and searched for Devil's marks, three of which had been found as further evidence against him. To complete his misery, a pact with Satan signed in his own blood was produced in court, under the terms of which all women were to be made subject to his will.

It was common knowledge that the pact with the Devil required the surrender of the body and soul of a witch or sorcerer at the end of 20 years. But with true legalistic formality it was conceded that, should the pact be written on virgin parchment or prepared outside the magic circle, the agreement was null and void. Such contracts between a sorcerer and Satan were sometimes written, and invariably signed, in blood. In return for his soul the sorcerer would receive some specific gift or power. There is no evidence that the agreement afforded any protection against the Inquisition, however, for Satan only rarely intervened on behalf of his dupes. The production of such a document in court was usually sufficient to secure a verdict of guilty from the witch-fearing judges of the 17th century.

Gaufridi's Confession

Gaufridi's confession, which he had signed in prison, reflected the morbid state of mind of his accusers rather than that of the accused. He said he had eaten babies and celebrated a black mass at the sabbath, where he held the rank of Prince of the Synagogue, sprinkling the witches with consecrated wine, and he had exercised his magical power over women. 'More than a thousand persons have been poisoned by the irresistible attraction of my breath which filled them with passion. The Lady of la Palud, the mother of Madeleine, was fascinated like so many others. But Madeleine was taken with an unreasoned love and abandoned herself to me both in the Sabbath and outside the Sabbath... I was marked at the Sabbath of my contentment and I had Madeleine marked on her head, on her belly, on her legs, on her thighs, on her feet...'

In court Gaufridi strenuously repudiated the confession, declaring it to consist of fantasies in the minds of the inquisitors, extorted from him by torture. But protest was useless; the confession and the pact were sufficient to damn any man in the eyes of 17th-century Christians, and Gaufridi was found guilty and condemned to suffer death by fire. He was to be burned slowly over a pyre of bushes instead of logs, so that his anguish would be prolonged. His tormentors gave him no peace, and even after his sentence he was pestered with demands for the names of his accomplices.

Exquisite Torments

On 20 April his spirit weakened and his mind gave way to despair. He cried out to his tormentors that, since nobody would listen to the truth, he might as well admit everything. On 30 April 1611, with head and feet bare and with a rope around his neck, he went through the official mummery of asking pardon of God. He was handed over to the torturers again to undergo certain exquisite torments that had been reserved for him.

After the torture, the shattered body of the still living Gaufridi was dragged on a hurdle through the streets for five hours, escorted by archers. Arriving at the place of execution, the priest was granted the unexpected mercy of strangulation before the fire was lit, thus escaping the ultimate horror of the original sentence. His lifeless body was then burned to ashes.

As if by the influence of a magic charm Madeleine suddenly became free of her tormenting devils, thus disposing of any doubts that may have remained about Gaufridi's guilt. Her fellow demoniac, Louise Capeau, was less fortunate, for she was harassed by demons to the end of her days, while the devil mania itself spread to the nuns of other convents before it finally subsided. Madeleine, however, never escaped from the watchful eyes of the Inquisition. Once the taint of diabolic possession had become associated with an individual, no one really knew what infamies the devils might venture on next.

A generation after Gaufridi's execution, the year 1642 saw her defending herself with difficulty against a charge of witchcraft. Ten years later she was prosecuted again and this time, incriminated by the Devil's marks which had reappeared on her body, was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment; she was released, at an advanced age, into the custody of a relative. Madeleine de Demandolx found freedom at last in death in 1670, at the age of 77.

ERIC MAPLE

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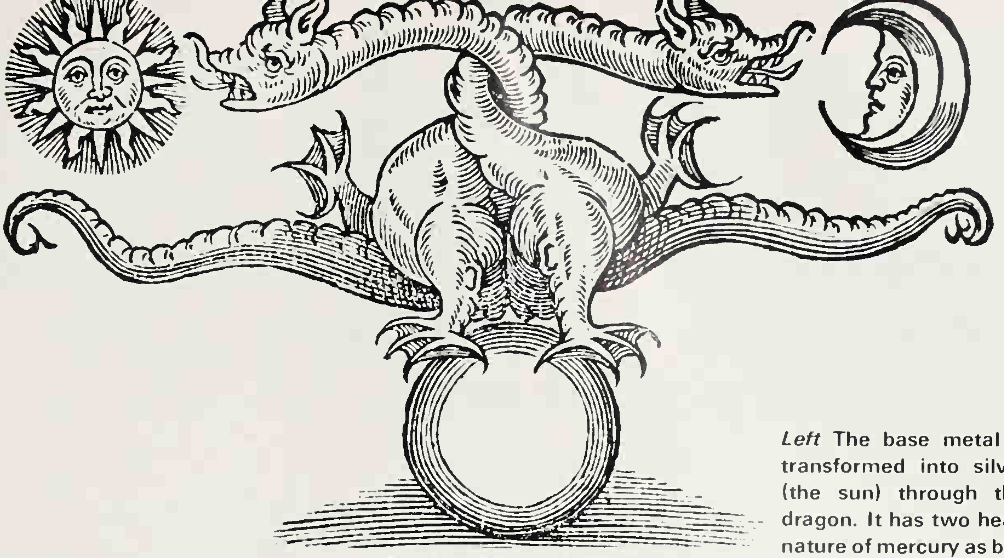


Ronan Picture Library E P Goldschmidt

Left **The base metal (the globe of the earth) transformed into silver (the moon) and gold (the sun) through the use of mercury, the dragon. It has two heads because of the double nature of mercury as both a metal and a liquid**

ALCHEMY

The alchemists moved along two tracks, which to most of us will never meet – one mystical and the other chemical. But to the adepts these were one track, for they believed that through the processes of the art they could both perfect themselves as human beings and perfect metals by turning them into gold

IN MOST BOOKS OF REFERENCE, even today, alchemy is described as a false science, based on the pretence that gold could be made from other metals, and it is still often referred to as nothing more than a fraudulent or inefficient forerunner of modern chemistry. These are misguided descriptions, which fail to take account of modern advances in the study of the philosophical and psychological side of the subject.

Alchemy was more an art than a science and its most important and most interesting aim was the spiritual transformation of the alchemist himself. For the mystical alchemists, the art involved both a chemical process and a spiritual process, both the turning of lead into gold and the transmutation of the alchemist from a state of 'leaden' earthly impurity to one of 'golden' spiritual perfection.

The Alchemical Labyrinth

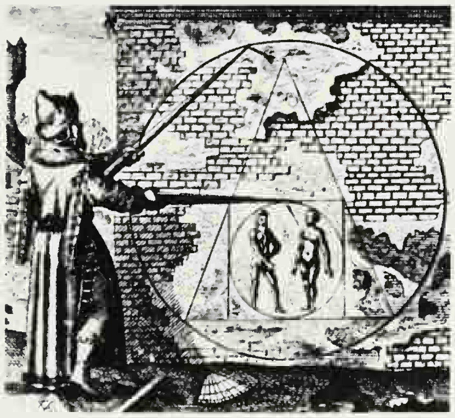
Whether we are ever likely to gain a full understanding of the details of alchemical operations is doubtful, because of the obscure language of so many of the old texts. This obscurity of language and symbolism was deliberate. The medieval alchemist was uncomfortably close to heresy because, for the redemption of his soul from earthly bondage, he relied on his own efforts combined with devout and direct appeals to God, rather than on an approach to the divine through the conventional medium of the Church.

This spiritual position near the brink of heresy was one reason for the cryptic mystery-mongering of alchemical writers. They also recognized that the forces of nature involved in the 'great work' could be dangerous: violent explosions were a frequent accompaniment of alchemical operations. But above all they were determined to keep powerful mysteries of material and spiritual progress out of the hands of the greedy and the unworthy. As Thomas Norton of Bristol puts it in the 15th century, in his poem called *Ordinal of Alchemy:*

> This art must ever secret be,
> The cause whereof is this, as ye may see;
> If one evil man had thereof all his will,
> All Christian peace he might easily spill,
> And with his pride he might pull down
> Rightful kings and princes of renown.

The Mysterious Stone

Comments by alchemists on the Stone which turns all things to gold:



From a man and a woman make a circle, then a square, then a triangle, finally a circle, and you will obtain the Philosopher's Stone.

Michael Maier

But when we marry the crowned king with the red daughter, she will conceive a son in the gentle fire, and shall nourish him through our fire . . . Then is he transformed, and his tincture (tinge of colour) remains red as flesh. Our son of royal birth takes his tincture from the fire, and death, darkness and the waters flee away. The dragon shuns the light of the sun, and our dead son shall live. The king comes forth from the fire and rejoices in the marriage.

Tractatus aureus

Take the serpent and place it in the chariot with four wheels and let it be turned about on the earth until it is immersed in the depths of the sea, and nothing more is visible but the blackest Dead Sea. . . . and when the vapour is precipitated like rain . . . you should bring the chariot from water to dry land, and then you have placed the four wheels on the chariot, and will obtain the result if you will advance further to the Red Sea, running without running, moving without motion.

Tractatus Aristotelis ad Alexandrum Magnum

Out of other things thou wilt never make the One, until thou hast first become One thyself.

Gerhard Dorn

To put off the incompetent and unworthy, alchemical writers veiled their directions behind a tangled code of symbols – the dragon, the king, the king's son, the grey wolf, the black crow, the lepers, the lion and the unicorn, the slaughter of the innocents, the royal marriage, the Ethiopian, the tree, the peacock, the bath and many more. An unusually simple example is that the spherical glass vessel used in many alchemical processes was called 'the philosophers' egg', not only because of its shape but because the Philosophers' Stone – which turns all things to gold – would emerge from the vessel just as, in an old legend, the universe was hatched from an egg.

The 'great work' laid a heavy burden on those who attempted it. It involved hours of prayer for God's grace and help, and the reading of almost impossibly difficult books – a task which had to be repeated many times until, slowly and painfully, their hidden meaning loomed up through the mists of symbolism. It meant months and years of toil over stills and furnaces, difficult processes being repeated over and over again with inadequate equipment. The experimenter wound his way through a labyrinth of false starts, misleading side tracks, dead ends, false hopes, disappointments, disasters and delays. Whether we believe that any of the alchemists ever reached the heart of the maze or not, those who devoted themselves body and soul to the art cannot all be dismissed as fools or swindlers.

Gold and the Stone

The aim of alchemy – on the physical plane at least – was to take a raw material (usually but not always a metal) and through long and complicated chemical processes to manufacture the Philosophers' Stone. The Stone had in itself the power of perfecting matter and when a small quantity of it was mixed with other materials, it would turn them into gold.

Many of the descriptions of the Stone do not suggest a real object at all. It is made of

'I answered that it looked yellow, like gold. Yes, he said, it is supposed to be gold. I took it out and gold it was.'

fire and water; it is a stone but not a stone; it comes from God but does not come from God; it grows from flesh and blood, and yet is made of animal, vegetable and mineral; unknown and yet known to everyone, it is generally considered worthless and yet supremely valuable.

These descriptions sometimes refer to the Stone, the final step in the 'great work', and sometimes to the raw material with which the alchemist was supposed to begin, the first step in his operations. This curious meeting of the opposite ends of the work was symbolized by a snake swallowing its own tail, called the Ouroboros. From the spiritual point of view, the snake probably meant that alchemy begins and ends with man: the alchemist himself is the raw material of the work and he is also its final product – himself perfected. *Ars totum requirit hominem*, the alchemists said, 'the art requires the whole man'.

Despite the rhapsodical and paradoxical descriptions of the Stone, which relate to the alchemist himself – the true 'egg' in which the spiritual Stone was hatched – many alchemists evidently believed that the Philosophers' Stone did exist as a real physical object, that it did in reality turn things to gold, and that some great masters of the art had succeeded in manufacturing it.

One adept who was believed to possess the Stone was Paracelsus, the famous 16th century doctor and theorist. An account in a book by Michael Neander published at Leipzig in 1586 *(Orbis Terrae Partium Succinta Explicatio)* describes how Paracelsus heated a pound of mercury in a crucible. When it began to smoke, a piece of wax containing grains of the 'red lion' – the Stone in the form of red powder – was dropped into the crucible. The crucible was covered. Half an hour later, Paracelsus asked what the mixture in the crucible looked like. 'I answered that it looked yellow, like gold. Yes, he said, it is supposed to be gold. I took it out and gold it was. He said: Take it to the goldsmith who lives above the pharmacy and tell him to pay me for it. I did as he said and the goldsmith weighed it. Its weight was a pound minus half an ounce. And he went for money. . .'

As late as 1782 there was a tremendous sensation in England when James Price, chemist and Fellow of the Royal Society, mixed a white powder with fifty times its own weight of mercury, added borax and nitre, and heated the mixture in a crucible, stirring it with an iron rod. The result was an ingot of genuine silver. When the same operation was repeated with a red powder, the result was genuine gold. However, when the Royal Society insisted that the experiments be repeated before observers chosen by the Society, Price reluctantly agreed and then committed suicide by drinking prussic acid, collapsing and dying before the observers' eyes. It was assumed that he had introduced silver or gold into the crucible through a hollow stirring rod.

Various medals and coins were struck to commemorate supposedly successful transmutations. There is the great medal of 'alchemical gold' dated 1677, for instance, struck for the Emperor Leopold I by the alchemist Wenceslaus von Reinburg; a medal of 1609, showing alchemical symbols for mercury and gold; another struck by the Baron Pfenninger with the inscription *Aurea progenies – plumbo prognata parente*, 'golden progeny begotten by lead as the father', which shows Saturn, the symbol for lead, with the head of the rayed sun (gold); and there are many others.

The King of Metals

The sources of the alchemical path were many. It became a necessary way of thought once man had mastered the strange process of applying heat to certain kinds of rock and thereby changing its nature into dross and shining metal. Then came the other wonder of mixing two metals in a fluid state and so producing a new metallic alloy which had different characteristics from either of its parents. Some metals tarnished and could be restored to health by washing with various vegetable juices. All could be purified by a renewed passage through the fire, by melting and burning away the dross, or by heating and beating until the impurities flaked away as swarf. The king of metals was the first known because it had no alloys in nature but was found in glistening golden grains in stream-beds. Even when it was melted like other metals, it remained itself, brilliant, sun-like gold. It did not corrode with time, it could not be dissolved by any ordinary acid, it was irresistibly beautiful and adorned all who wore it . . . It became symbolic of royal power as simply and as naturally as it was linked with the sun. . .

C. A. Burland *The Arts of the Alchemists*

Did Alchemy Work?

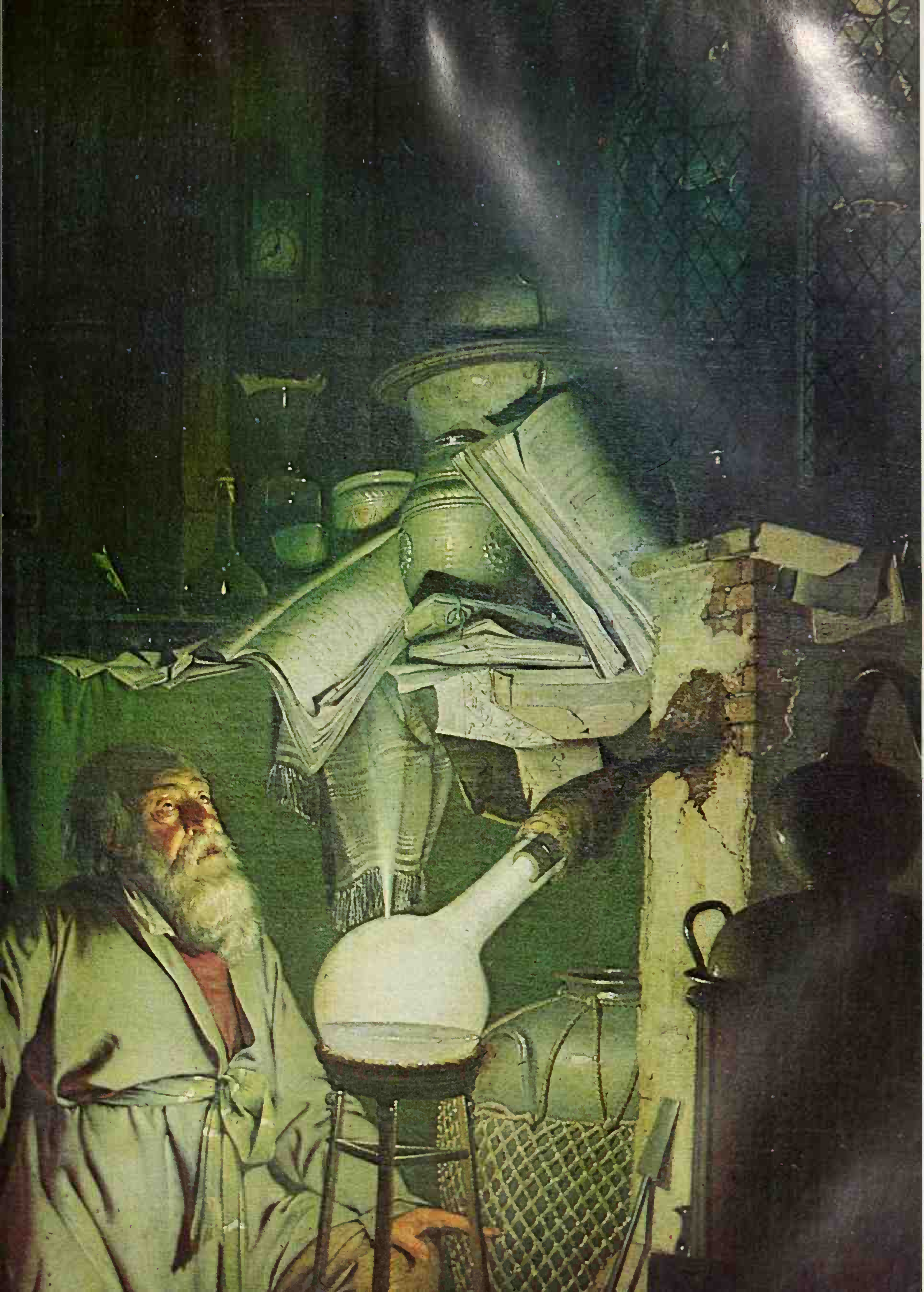
Few modern scientists would accept th truth of the alchemists' claim: that metal could be turned into gold through the us of a secret substance, the Philosophers Stone, and with little more equipment tha a furnace and a crucible. Most investigator have concluded that the alchemists wer either fraudulent or mistaken. That man swindles were perpetrated is beyond an doubt but no serious historian of alchem has ever tried to explain away *all* the evi dence as the product of deliberate deception

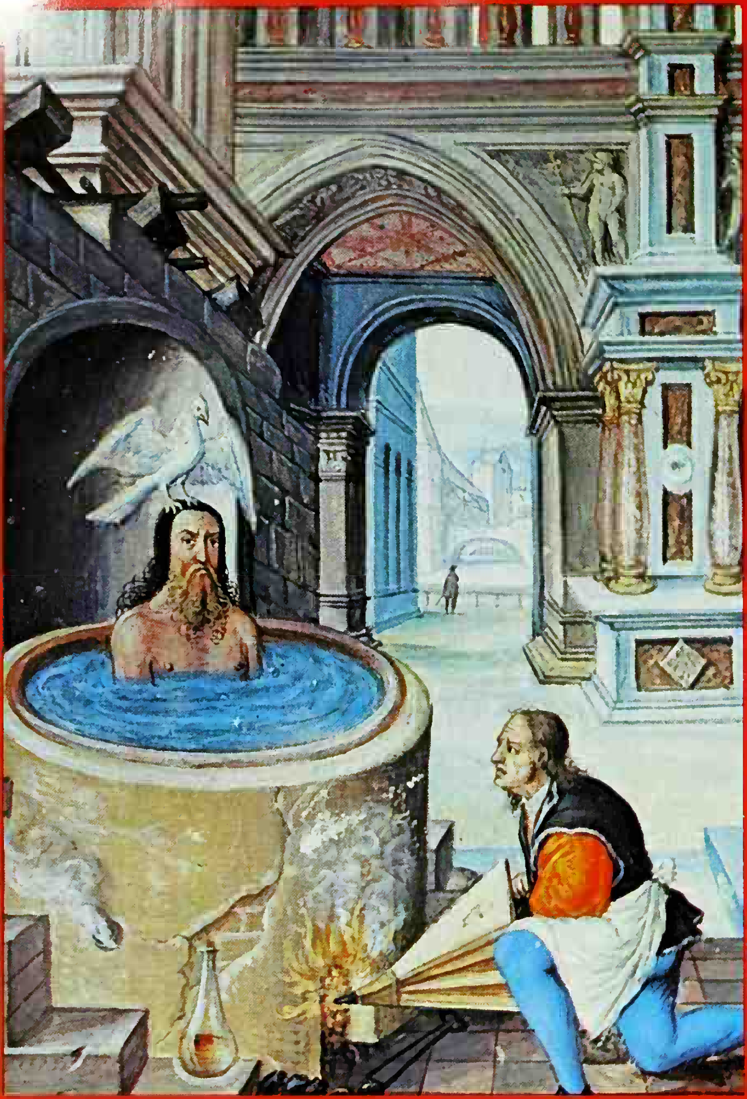
Mercury was a material used constantl in alchemy and it has been suggested tha vapours from heated mercury may hav caused hallucinations. Alternatively, A Siggel and other historians of chemistry hav pointed out that the alchemists lacked th knowledge of the modern chemist and tha for them any yellowish material was virtuall the same as gold. In many cases they ma have succeeded in giving some other metal golden colour and then concluded that the had made gold. Alchemical manufacture o silver has been explained by reference t arsenic compounds like orpiment and realga which together with copper form 'silvery alloys. Siggel has suggested that the yellov brass which, before zinc was known as metal, was sometimes made in the Middl Ages by treating calamine and copper could be taken for the alchemists' 'gold'.

The main objection to these theories is that alchemical gold was apparently quit frequently tested and accepted by professional goldsmiths. Brass might perhaps have been mistaken for gold in antiquity but probably not in Europe of the 15th and 16th centuries.

One powerful argument against the validity of alchemy is the fact that its supposedly successful practitioners do not seem to have become wealthy men. When Paracelsus made his will – signed on 24 September 1541, three days before his death – he made no mention of gold and silver. All he had to leave was books and ordinary personal property,, and his most valuable single possession was a silve

Alchemists made important contributions to the study of chemistry. In this 18th century painting by Joseph Wright of Derby, an alchemist named Hennig Brand is shown discovering phosphorus

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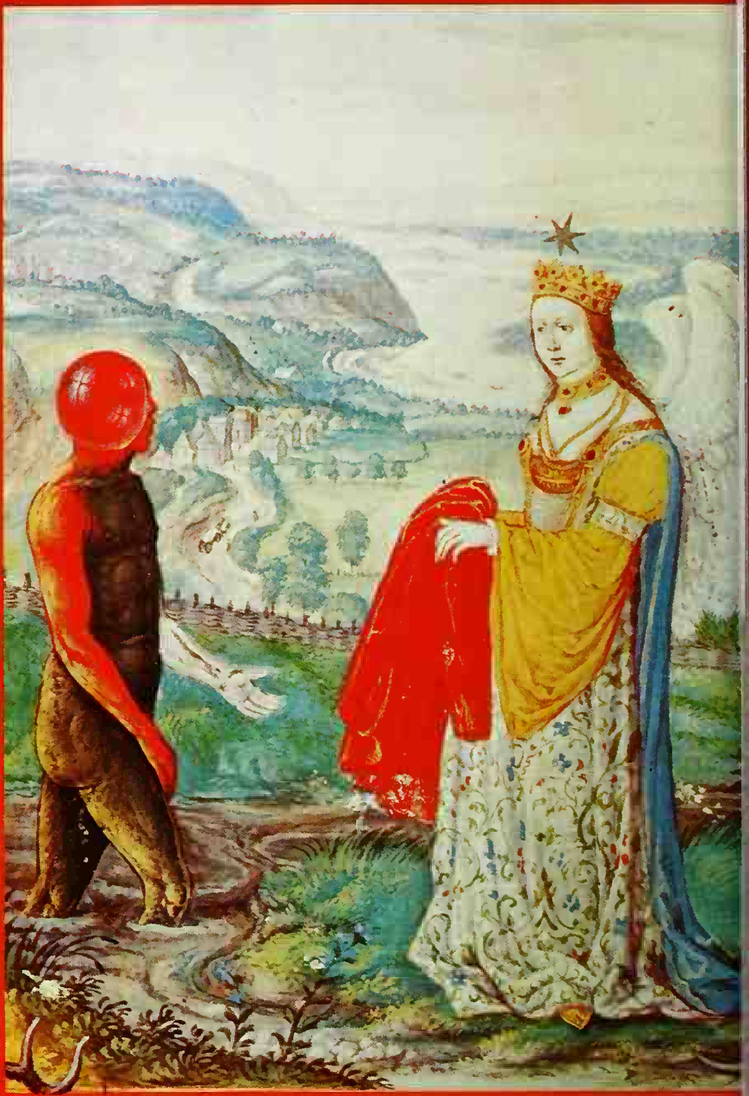
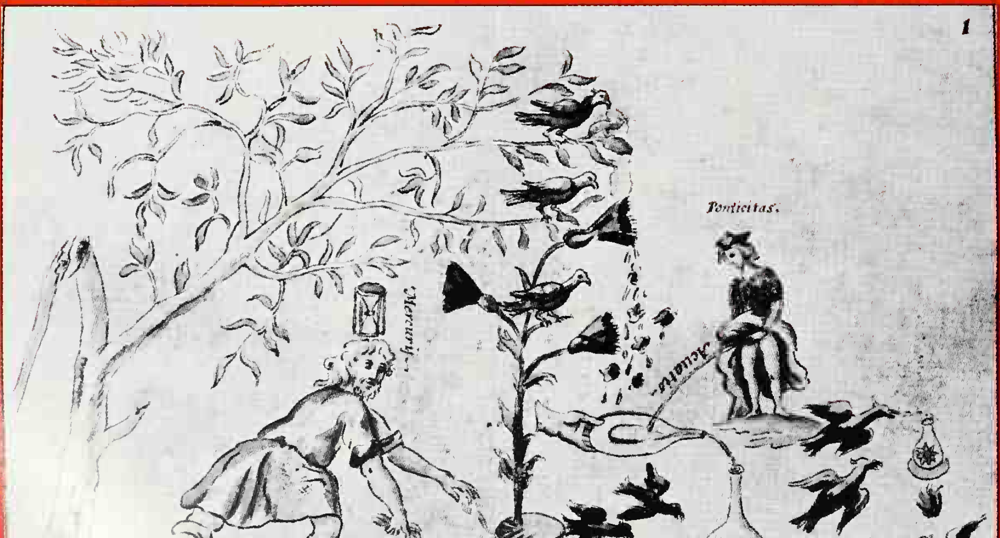


Top left The theme of rebirth was important in alchemical theory: the spiritual rebirth of the alchemist after the killing of his old self, and the rebirth of the base metal after the alchemist had 'killed' it by stripping it of its qualities. The Bath of Rebirth, from the 16th century *Splendor Solis* of Salomon Trismosin *Top right* Another illustration from *Splendor Solis*: the black figure, which has been killed, is rising fro the waters of rebirth and beginning to glow with the blood-red hue o new life *Bottom left* Symbols of the materials used in the work, fro *Cabala Mineralis*, in the British Museum *Bottom right* More symbols o death and resurrection, from an alchemical MS in the British Museum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Ponticitas.
Mercurij.
Acuatis
Fodina
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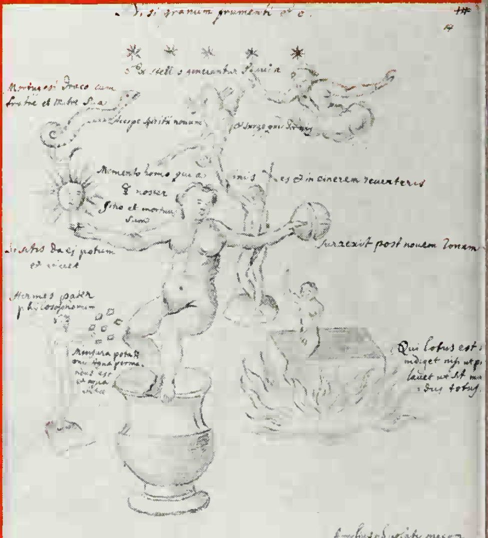

granum frumenti
Hermes pater philosophorum
Surrexit post nouem

To a basis in practical metallurgy, mystical and magical doctrines were added . . .

chalice decorated with lions' heads and weighing little more than 4 ounces. If Paracelsus could make gold in large quantities, he seems to have been strangely uninterested in doing so.

The 'Parachemical' Explanation

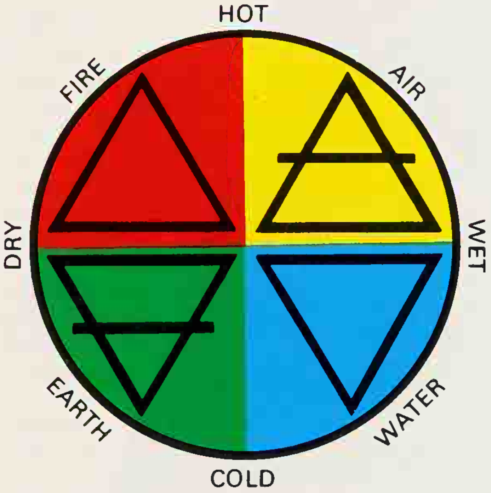
The following suggestion is put forward tentatively for what it may be worth as a possible interpretation of evidence which is confused and inadequate.

Investigators in the field of parapsychology have suggested that there are cases of 'psychokinesis' or 'telekinesis' in which a person causes changes in his physical surroundings – by causing objects to move about, for instance – without physical action on his part and apparently by means of some 'psychic' force. It is possible – though certainly not proven – that the long and intense concentration of an alchemist on his materials and operations, and the physically exhausting toil of the work, might induce an unusual condition of mind in which the alchemist was able to cause abnormal chemical reactions in his materials. These might be termed 'parachemical' reactions, possibly accounting for the alchemist's success.

If this were so, we would expect it to occur only very rarely and for very short periods of time – which would explain the inability of successful adepts to grow rich by making large quantities of gold.

On this hypothesis, the 'grace of God' for which alchemists devoutly prayed and without which, they said, the work could not succeed, would be interpreted as the rare and fleeting psychic ability to cause parachemical change in the alchemist's materials – an ability which in a pious age seemed to be something coming from outside the alchemist himself, as a gift from God. The reading and re-reading of mysterious books, rich in symbolism, might create a suitable mental atmosphere for this ability to show itself, a condition of mental exhaustion and 'headiness', a kind of drunkenness of the imagination. And the same mental condition might also be contributed to by the exhaustion produced by long concentration on the chemical operations themselves, performed over and over again.

In this light, it is not surprising that so many alchemical writers insist that guidance from a 'master', a successful adept, was essential for success. The adept's experience would enable him to guide and train the experimenter in the development and control of parachemical ability.



First Matter and the Elements

Western alchemy originated, so far as we know, in Egypt in the last centuries before Christ. In the East there is another old nucleus of alchemical doctrine in China, connected with Taoist philosophy and magic. The highest stage of enlightenment there was designated by the symbol of the Golden Flower, and there seem to be parallels and even connections with occidental alchemy. But our knowledge of Chinese alchemy is still very limited.

In Egypt, part of the basis of early alchemy came from the metalworking techniques of the ancient world. Craftsmen had reached a high level of competence in producing silver and copper alloys which looked like gold, so much so that a large number of technical terms had to be invented for the numerous different varieties of 'gold' which were available. A papyrus found at Thebes in Egypt, written in Greek c 300 AD, contains recipes for changing the colour of a metal so as to make it resemble gold or silver, and claims that the results will successfully pass all the tests for natural gold or silver. (This emphasis on changing the colour of a metal supports the theory of Siggel and others, mentioned earlier, at least so far as the early history of alchemy is concerned.)

To this basis in practical metallurgy, mystical and magical doctrines were added, often put out under the name of Hermes Trismegistus, 'thrice-greatest Hermes' – hence the later references to alchemy as the 'hermetic' art or philosophy. Some of the essential alchemical doctrines had been formulated before 400 AD.

It was accepted that all things are made of a primeval substance called 'first matter', the substance from which the world was originally made; with the implication that an experimenter could strip a material of its ephemeral qualities – such as colour, size, shape, weight – and get back to the irreducible element of first matter. He could then add to first matter the qualities needed to make it into gold. And there was the parallel implication that the alchemist could do the same thing in the inner reaches of his own being.

The prevailing theory of the elements, which was worked out by Greek philosophers and reigned almost unchallenged until the 17th century, also gave the alchemists support for their belief that the 'base' metals – lead, copper, tin, iron – could be changed into the precious metals, silver and gold. The theory was that all things are made of differing mixtures of four basic elements – fire, air, earth and water. These elements were the first stage in the 'growth' or development of first matter, and each combined two of the four primary qualities – hot, cold, dry, wet. Fire was hot and dry, earth was dry and cold, and so on (see diagram).

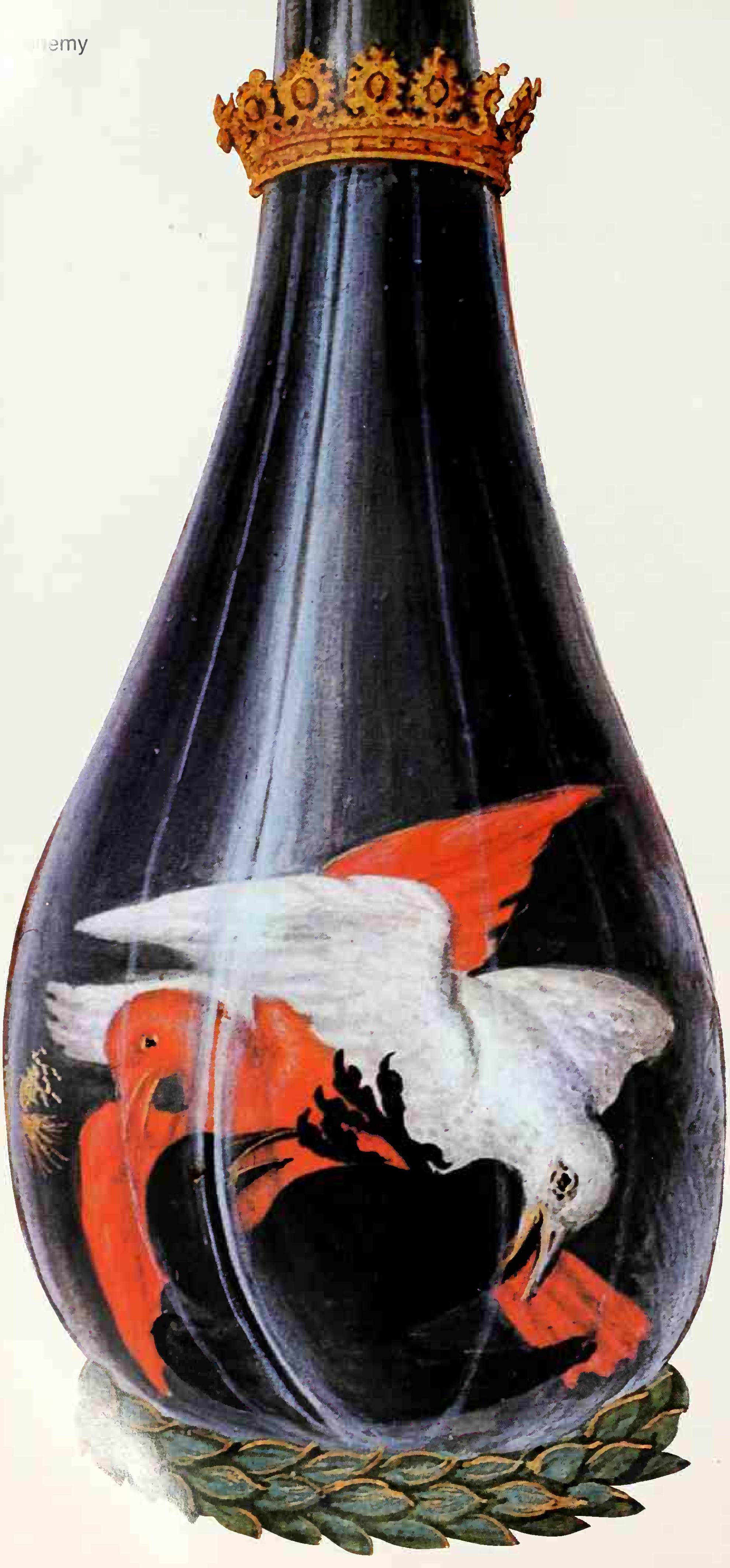
Now, if one of the qualities in an element alters, it changes into a different element. If water (cold and wet) is heated, it changes into air (hot and wet) in giving off vapour. If a burning fire (hot and dry) dies down and loses its heat, it changes into earth (cold and dry) in turning into ashes.

The theory suggested that if alchemists altered the elemental structure of, say, lead, they could turn it into gold. The theory also determined the pattern of their chemical processes, which consisted mainly of heating and cooling, drying and liquefying.

Metals and Planets

Another theory, which was the basis of much alchemical symbolism, connected the seven principal metals with the seven planets known to the ancient world. The two precious metals were assigned to the two most

GOLD	☉	SUN
SILVER	☽	MOON
MERCURY	☿	MERCURY
COPPER	♀	VENUS
IRON	♂	MARS
TIN	♃	JUPITER
LEAD	♄	SATURN



'valuable' heavenly bodies, those which gave light – the sun (gold) and the moon (silver) – and the remaining metals to the other planets (see diagram).

It was assumed that metals developed in the earth, each under the influence of its own planet; that metals had a natural tendency to 'grow' or develop into the noblest and most perfect of their kind – gold; but that owing to the accidents of Nature the metals reached this desirable end all too seldom. The alchemist, theoretically, could take the 'lowest' of metals, lead, and develop or 'ripen' it through the stages of the planetary chain until it became gold. A medieval work called *The Investigation of Perfection* says of alchemy (in a 17th century translation) that 'This *Science* treats of the *Imperfect Bodies* of *Minerals*, and teacheth how to perfect them'. And again there was the parallel with the successive stages in the 'perfecting' of the imperfect alchemist himself.

The Sex of Metals

To the alchemists, metals and minerals were 'alive'. They grew in the belly of the earth and were endowed with sex. A German handbook on metals, printed in 1505, says, 'It is to be noted that for the growth or generation of a metal ore there must be a begetter and some subject capable of receiving the generative action' and that 'in the union of mercury and sulphur in the ore, the sulphur behaves like the male seed and the mercury like the female seed in the conception and birth of a child.'

Underlying these various theories, from very early times, was the belief in the unity of the universe: that all the varied phenomena of the world are parts of one harmonious whole, and that just as a man's body contains his soul or spirit, so the 'body' or matter of the world is permeated by a universal 'spirit'. Alchemists came to believe that the universal spirit could be compressed or concentrated into the marvellous Philosophers' Stone, and that in this form it would 'ripen' or 'perfect' the other metals and turn them to gold.

British Museum

In the alembic are the three stages of the work shown by the black, white and red birds; the body, soul and spirit in man; mercury, sulphur and salt in chemistry; the elements which have to be united to produce the Philosophers' Stone.

Magical Initiation in Alchemy

They (the alchemists) all begin with a substance in nature which is described as existing almost everywhere, and as universally esteemed of no value. The alchemist is in all cases to take this substance and subject it to a series of operations. By so doing, he obtains his product. This product, however named or described, is always a substance which represents the truth or perfection of the original 'First Matter'; and its qualities are invariably such as pertain to a living being, not to an inanimate mass. In a word, the alchemist is to take a dead thing, impure, valueless, and powerless, and transform it into a live thing, active, invaluable and thaumaturgic.

. . . The First Matter is a man, that is to say, a perishable parasite, bred of the earth's crust, crawling irritably upon it for a span, and at last returning to the dirt whence he sprang. The process of initiation consists in removing his impurities, and finding in his true self an immortal intelligence to whom matter is no more than the means of manifestation. The initiate is eternally individual; he is ineffable, incorruptible, immune from everything. He possesses infinite wisdom and infinite power in himself.

Aleister Crowley
Magick in Theory and Practice

The Alchemy of the Mind

In this century psychologists, notably C. G. Jung, have begun to pay serious attention to the symbolism of alchemy. Jung's interpretations are often not much easier to understand than the obscure texts of the old alchemists themselves but his investigations focused attention on 'esoteric' alchemy, on the symbolism as opposed to the chemistry, on the alchemist's attempt to perfect himself as contrasted with his attempt to make gold. Though it must be remembered that the two sides of alchemy are like two faces of one coin and cannot properly be separated. The search for the Stone was *both* a search for gold and a search for spiritual perfection.

Jung's approach to alchemy was based on his discovery of alchemical symbolism in the dreams of some of his patients – patients who themselves knew nothing of alchemy at all.

This suggested that the symbols – the snakes, dragons, lions and wolves, the springs and fountains, the trees, castles and the rest – were not chosen deliberately by mystery-mongering authors out to impress the gullible or cheat the greedy, but that they correspond to ageless realities of the human mind.

Jung believed that the 'great work' of alchemy was very close to what he called 'individuation', the shaping of an integrated personality. The symbols are a secret language of the mind, which stand for psychological processes and stages in the 'work'. The alchemist, he explains in *Psychology and Alchemy*, was really exploring not the nature of matter but his own unconscious mind.

> The real nature of matter was unknown to the alchemist: he knew it only in hints. Inasmuch as he tried to explore it he projected the unconscious into the darkness of matter in order to illuminate it. In order to explain the mystery of matter he projected yet another mystery – namely his own psychic background – into what was to be explained: *Obscurum per obscurius, ignotum per ignotius!* This procedure was not, of course, intentional; it was an involuntary occurrence.

The Latin words in this quotation are an alchemical maxim, meaning that the obscure is to be explained by the more obscure, the unknown by the more unknown.

Another favourite maxim of the alchemists was *Solve et coagula*, 'dissolve and combine'. *Alchimia vera* ('The True Alchemy'), a German work of 1604, says that the whole secret of the art is hidden in these three words. To 'dissolve' refers to the old belief that the characteristics of a substance could be stripped away from it, to reduce it to first matter. To 'combine' meant to build up a new substance by adding desirable characteristics to the first matter.

Psychologically, to dissolve means to break down and destroy surface mental characteristics and attitudes which surround and obscure a man's basic self. To combine is to build up a new integrated personality.

Death and Resurrection

The details of alchemical processes are extremely complicated and vary from one alchemical textbook to another. But, broadly speaking, the first steps in the 'great work' were concerned with the 'dissolution', the reduction of the material in the alchemist's vessel to first matter. The parallel in the mind is the destruction of attitudes, ideas, complexes, of the whole outer shell of the personality.

In alchemy this process ended with what was called *nigredo*, the 'black' stage, when the material in the vessel had been broken down to first matter and was said to be 'dead' and 'putrefying'; when the alchemist himself had subjected his own personality to the fiery furnace of self-questioning and self-doubt, had gone down into his own inner abyss, had apparently destroyed himself and lay 'dead', 'rotting' in the slime which was all that was left of his ideals, his hopes and ambitions, his defences against the outer world.

The nigredo corresponds to the mock death found in many rituals of initiation. Among some primitive tribes, a magician's initiation involves a sleep of 'death' from which he is 'reborn'. In the *Golden Ass* of Aupuleius, written in the 2nd century AD, the hero describes his initiation into the mysteries of the goddess Isis and says that he approached the very gates of death but was allowed to return. The alchemists often drew a parallel between the nigredo and the Crucifixion, the death from which Christ rose to new life. (See also INITIATION.)

The remaining processes of the work constituted the 'combination' or 'putting together again' after the 'dissolution' had been completed. After the nigredo came the rebirth, which is described in an alchemical version of the mass written by Nicholas Melchior, astrologer to the king of Hungary in the 16th century. The 'Ethiopian' or black man is the alchemist's material, black in the 'death' of the nigredo.

> Then will appear in the bottom of the vessel the mighty Ethiopian, burned, calcined, bleached, altogether dead and lifeless. He asks to be buried, to be sprinkled with his own moisture and slowly calcined till he shall arise in glowing form from the fierce fire. . . . Behold a wondrous restoration or renewal of the Ethiopian!

This is the 'bath of rebirth', in which a new inspiration, a new life, revives the alchemist after the 'death' of the nigredo. From this point on, often through a long succession of complicated processes, the alchemist built up the Stone, or the perfected personality, which, to quote Nicholas Melchior again, is 'the treasure of treasures, the supreme philosophical potion, the divine secret of the ancients. Blessed is he that finds such a thing'.

We know now that the alchemist's dream of turning base metals to gold is theoretically possible, though the cost of doing so would make the operation distinctly uneconomic. Modern nuclear physics has, in a sense, reached the alchemical goal but has totally neglected its non-material aim of perfecting the soul. When we consider its fell possibilities we may feel that perhaps Thomas Norton of Bristol was not so naive after all. 'This art must ever secret be. . . . If one evil man had thereof all his will, all Christian peace he might easily spill.'

(See also ELIXIR OF LIFE; MERCURY; PHILOSOPHERS' STONE.)

HANS BIEDERMANN

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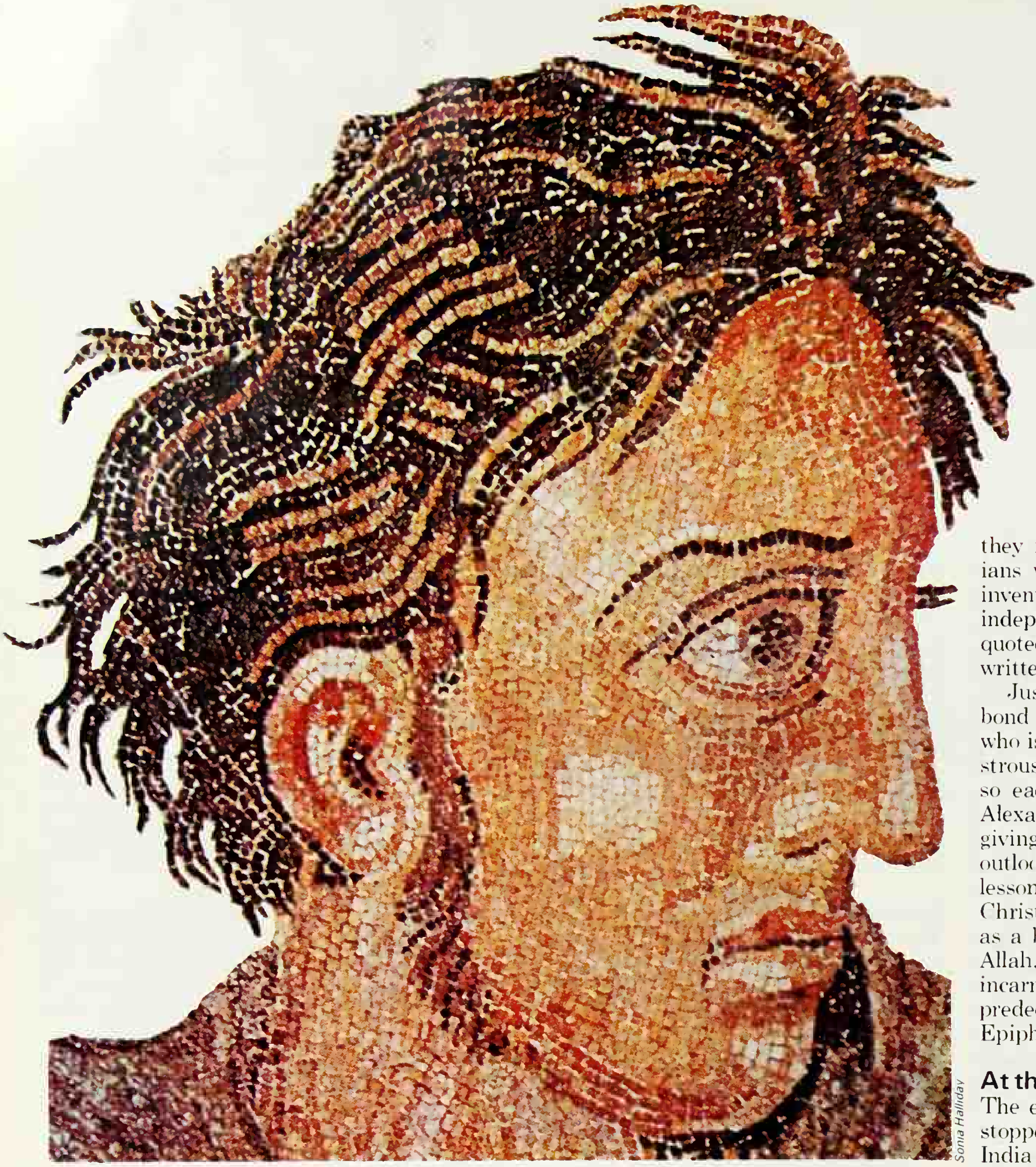


Sonia Halliday

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

One of his eyes was black and the other yellow; he went to the end of the earth and the bottom of the sea, and flew through the air; he encountered all kinds of monsters and wonders

ALEXANDER THE GREAT led his triumphant armies from Greece to the Nile and on into India, created a vast empire which no one afterwards could hold together, and died before he was 33. Deified in his own lifetime – he was recognized as a god by the Greek cities of the League of Corinth – his astonishing career caught the imagination of succeeding generations. Four hundred years after his death at Babylon in 323 BC, the Emperor Trajan, one of the ablest of Roman generals and rulers, went to ruined Babylon and offered sacrifice to Alexander's spirit in the room where he had died.

Legendary stories clustered round Alexander's memory like limpets on a rock and were retold for hundreds of years with alterations, additions and shifts of emphasis. They spread across Europe and Asia, as far west as Ireland and as far east as Java.

The core of the later romance of Alexander was a book written in Greek at Alexandria after 200 BC by an unknown writer now called pseudo-Callisthenes (because the book was originally wrongly attributed to a real Callisthenes). The original is lost but four revisions of it have survived. It combined accurate historical material with legend. Later authors expanded it and translated it into other languages, with liberal additions in which they mingled material from reliable historians with imaginative fictions of their own invention and fables which were originally independent of Alexander. They often quoted letters supposedly, but not really written by Alexander or to him.

Just as many of us now cannot feel any bond of sympathy with a character in fiction who is too far from our own likeness – a monstrous Martian or Venusian, for instance – so each different audience for the tales of Alexander made him one of themselves by giving him their own setting, nationality and outlook. As a result, he appears as an object lesson in the workings of fate, or as a saintly Christian, though he lived long before Christ; as a benefactor of the Jews, an emissary of Allah, a noble medieval knight, or even as an incarnation of the Devil because he was a predecessor of the 'Antichrist' Antiochus IV Epiphanes (see ANTICHRIST).

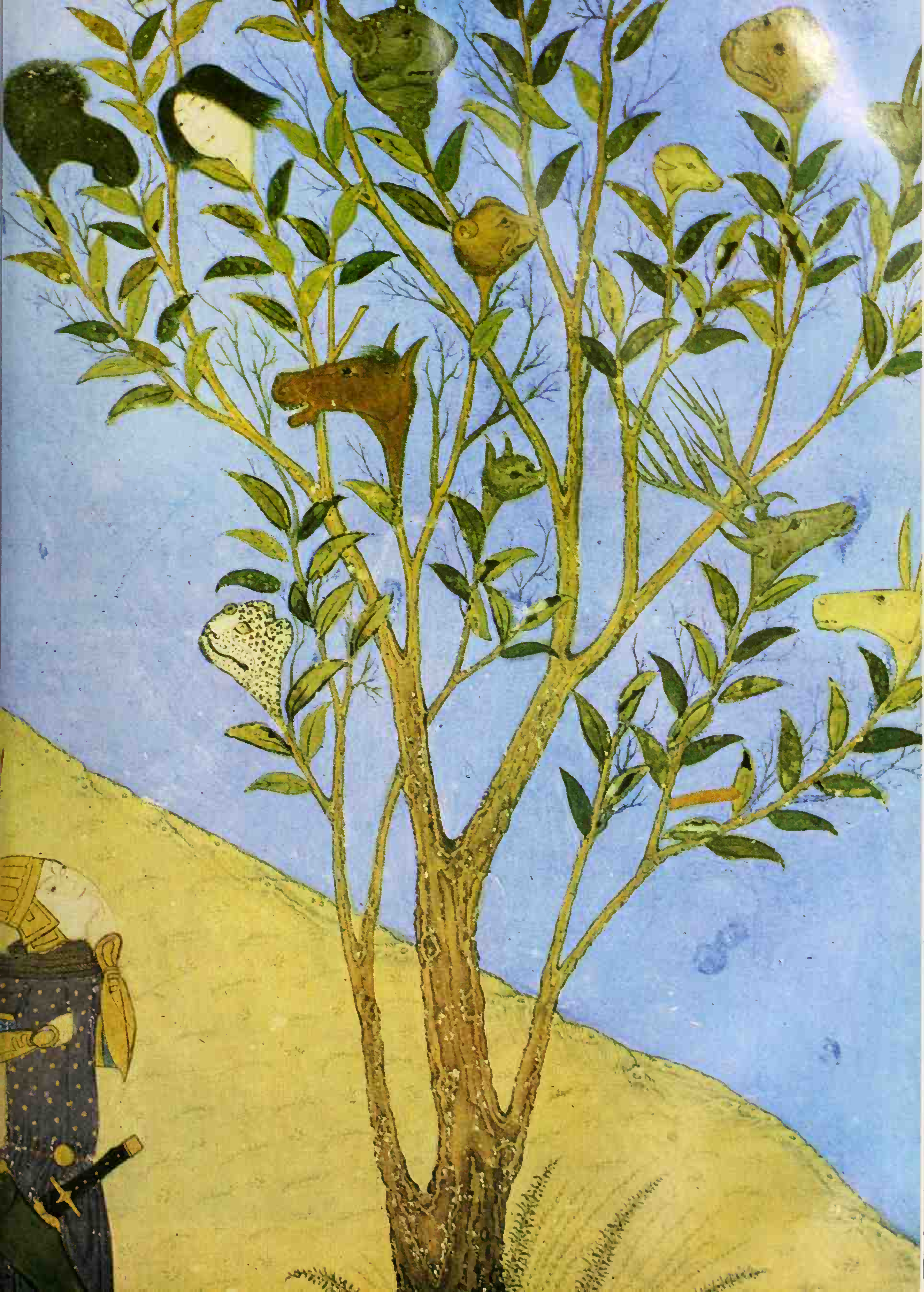
At the World's End

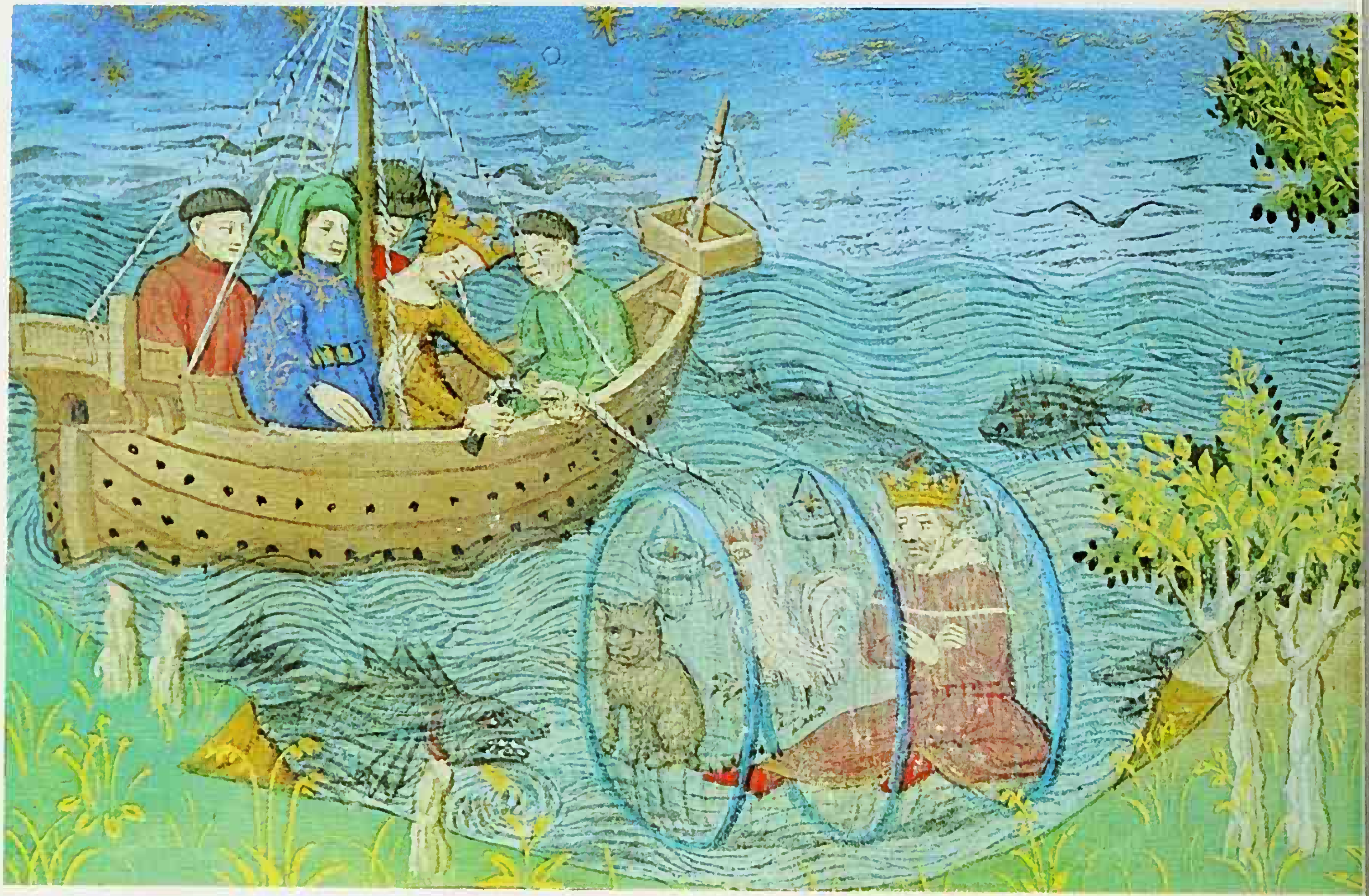
The extent of Alexander's travels – he only stopped, reluctantly, when he had invaded India because his soldiers refused to go any further east – inspired stories about him reaching the end of the earth, where paradise, the fountain of life and other marvels were to be found.

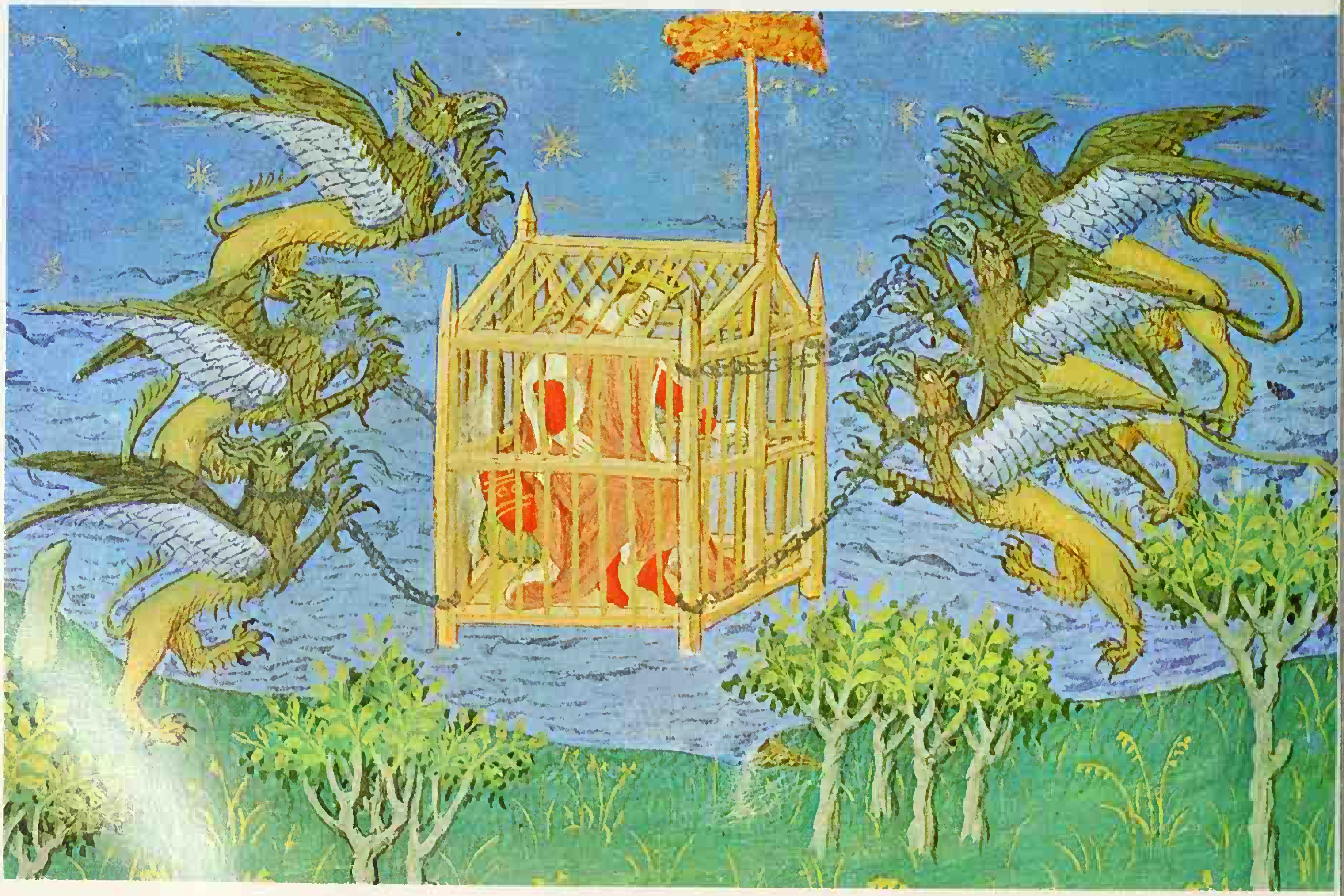
Some of these stories were told to draw a moral. A Jewish tale in the Babylonian Talmud (before 500 AD) says that Alexander reached the earthly paradise but was turned back at the gate because 'only the just can enter here'. But he was given a mysterious ball as a present, which turned out to be an eyeball. The eye, like Alexander himself, is restlessly insatiable and tries to encompass the whole earth and yet only a handful of dust dropped on it, blinds it and blots it out; the dust, of course, being death to which all men come, even the most successful.

This story was expanded later and appears in the 12th century in the German *Lay of Alexander* and the Latin *King Alexander's Journey to Paradise*. Alexander and his companions voyaged up the Ganges (or the Euphrates) till they came to the wall

Alexander's career of conquest seemed so superhuman that he became the hero of many legends *Left* Detail from a portrait in mosaic, found at Pompeii and now in the Museo Nazionale, Naples *Right* Alexander examines the talking tree







Over the castle's gateway was written, 'No man may go in to the greatest and least treasure of the world until he has passed the night of fear'

of a great city. There was no opening in the wall and they sailed on beside it for three days before they found a small window. When an old man came to the window, Alexander's lieutenants imperiously demanded tribute from the city. The old man sent them away, telling them that the city was the earthly paradise, the home of the blessed, but gave them a stone of mystic meaning as a present for Alexander.

Alexander took the stone back to Babylon, where various wise men puzzled their wits to find its meaning. At last an aged Jew demonstrated with scales that the stone was heavier than any quantity of gold but if a little dust was sprinkled on it, it was lighter than a feather. The stone stood for Alexander himself. The greatest of monarchs in life, a feather would outweigh his value once dusty death had claimed him.

There is the same motif in the story of how, on the way to the Wells of Life, Alexander came to a lake in which was an island, and on the island a castle and over the castle's gateway was written, 'No man may go in to the greatest and least treasure of the world until he has passed the night of fear.' Alexander and his men spent the night beating off the terrifying and dangerous attacks of tigers and dragons, monstrous crabs, lions the size of bulls, mice the size of foxes, foul bats and an army of wild men with six hands each.

In the morning the castle's drawbridge was lowered. They went in and saw a niche in the wall, above which was written, 'The greatest treasure and the least.' In the niche was a rich cushion and on it a stone shaped like an egg. When they looked into the stone they saw everything that a man could desire in this world, and when they weighed it against gold and silver it was heavier than all their treasure. But when a pinch of dust was put in the other pan of the scales, it outweighed the stone.

The extent of Alexander's victorious travels inspired stories about him reaching the ends of the earth, where he found all kinds of marvels. He also explored the limits of height and depth, flying in the air and descending to the bottom of the sea
Above **The first submarine voyage, from a manuscript in the British Museum**
Below **Alexander flies through the air in a basket drawn by six griffons. He was supposed to have steered them by dangling a piece of liver on a spear in front of their beaks**

Within a hundred years of his death Alexander was already said to have gone to the world's end looking for the water of life which conferred immortality – like other heroes. What was originally a separate story about 'the green one', who drank the water of life and became immortal, was tacked onto Alexander in the tale of his cook. Nearing the world's end, Alexander's expedition came to an area of many wells. The cook washed a dried fish in one of them and the fish came to life and swam away. The cook drank some of the water, became immortal and promptly turned green, the colour of vegetation which is reborn every spring. But the cook could not find the right well again. Furious, Alexander tried various methods of killing him – which all failed because he was immortal – and finally threw him into the sea, where he lives to this day as a sea-spirit.

Marvels and Monsters of the East

. . . we came to a wood inhabited by wild men with faces like ravens. We arrived at the country of the people whose feet are twisted, and next we came to the land of the lion-headed men. We came to a river where we saw a tree which grew from dawn to the sixth hour of the day, and which diminished from the sixth hour until night. We marched through a wilderness and arrived at the ocean. We saw what appeared to be an island and twenty of my men tried to swim there, but beasts came up out of the water and devoured them. We came to the land of the people having their eyes and mouths in their breasts. We saw the 'palm-bird' (phoenix). After a march of 65 days we arrived at Obarkia and saw two birds, one of which spoke Greek.

. . . we marched towards the east and after ten days arrived at a high mountain where a dragon lived. I caused the dragon to be slain. We marched on and arrived at a river called Barsatis and a high mountain. I left my troops and with two hundred of my friends marched to China in 25 days. . . .

From a fabricated letter of Alexander the Great to his former tutor, the philosopher Aristotle, in the Syrian version of pseudo-Callisthenes (translated by E. A. W. Budge).

Fiction from Fact

Many of the stories were built up around a grain of historical truth, like a pearl in an oyster. The daughter of a Scythian king, offered in marriage to the real Alexander but declined with thanks, turned into a Queen of the Amazons who visited the legendary Alexander with amorous intent. Another example is the famous story of Alexander's birth which represented him as the son of a god.

The real Alexander was the son of King Philip of Macedon, in northern Greece, and his queen, Olympias. When he drove the Persians out of Egypt, he was accepted as Pharaoh and when he visited the oracle of the god Ammon in the desert, as Pharaoh he was formally hailed by the priest as 'son of Ammon'. On this basis, apparently, pseudo-Callisthenes and other Egyptian authors said that Alexander was not really the son of Philip of Macedon. They said that the wise Nectanebus, King of Egypt, skilled in magic and astrology, fled before the invading Persians to Macedon and told Olympias that Ammon would father a child on her. Which Nectanebus, pretending to be the god and disguised as a dragon or a snake, duly did.

The legend may not be as cynical as it looks at first sight. Nectanebus may have been meant to be both himself and the vehicle of the god, for in Egyptian belief a pharaoh was a god. Plutarch, who lived at the turn of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, suggested that the snake came into the story because Olympias was a devotee of Dionysus and danced with snakes twined round her in the frenzy of his worship.

The Sky and the Sea-Bed

Alexander's rule of the West (Greece) as well as the East greatly impressed posterity and may account for the notion that one of his eyes was black (the West, sunset) and the other yellow (the East, sunrise). It may lie behind his Arabic title Dhul-Karnain, 'the two-horned', meaning that he had subdued both horns of the sun, or the horns may be those of Ammon, whose animal was the ram. It was not unfitting to suppose that he had also gone to the limits of height and depth; and so in legend he goes down to the bottom of the sea in a green glass box banded with iron, and flies through the air in a chariot drawn by birds or griffons, which he steered by dangling a bit of liver enticingly on a spear out of reach of their beaks.

His other legendary feats included shutting up the savage tribes of Gog and Magog behind a wall of iron and brass, from which they will pour out to wreak havoc in the last day, a story which appears in the Koran. He made love to the beautiful Candace, Queen of Ethiopia (or of India). He tamed a vicious man-eating horse which became his favourite war-charger and which was called Bucephalus, 'the bull-headed', because it had horns.

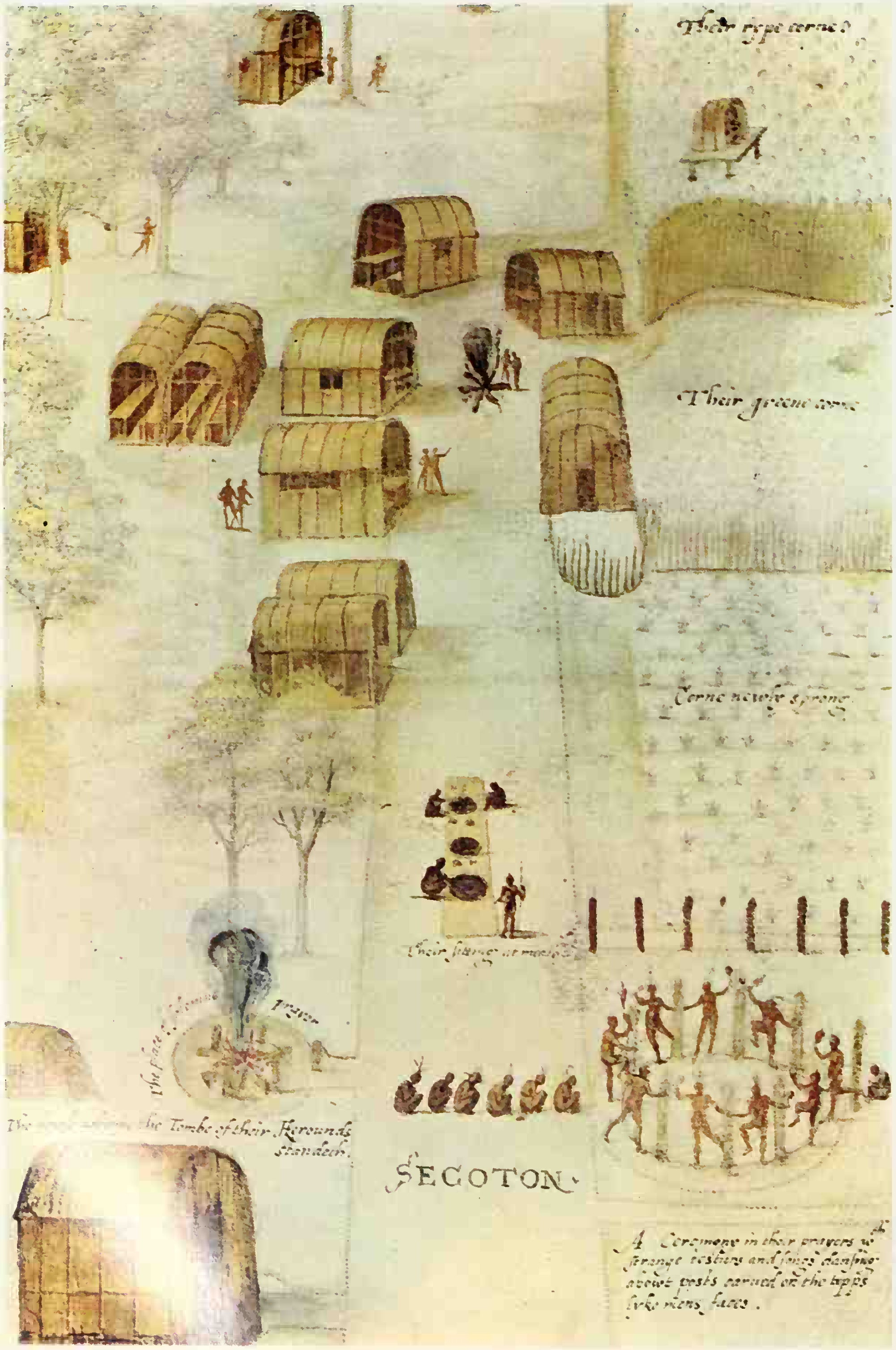
He met and defeated innumerable monsters and peculiar humans, gigantic ants, female cannibals, giants with six heads, dwarves with one leg, horses with the faces of men, men with the faces of dogs, and, in the English *King Alysaunder*, the people who stand on one foot all day gazing steadfastly at the sun.

In the 14th century Chaucer said that the tales of Alexander were so common 'that every wight that hath discretion hath heard somewhat or all of his fortune', and Philip the Bold of Burgundy took Alexander for his hero and model in much the same way that Alexander himself had conceived a great admiration for the Homeric hero Achilles.

Waning Reputation

With the revival of classical scholarship in the Renaissance the legend of Alexander began to go out of fashion and to be replaced by sober history. He has not lasted as well as King Arthur, about whose real life far less is known, and few of the stories about him are still common currency. He wept because there were no more worlds to conquer. When, at the height of his power, he asked the philosopher Diogenes what he could do for him, Diogenes replied, 'Move. You're standing in my light'. He cut the Gordian knot which no one had been able to untie; when he was told that whoever undid the knot would rule the East, he slashed it with his sword. But you may still be reminded of him if you hear 'The British Grenadiers' sung – 'Some talk of Alexander, and some of Hercules, Of Hector and Lysander, and such great names as these...'

FURTHER READING: N. G. Hammond, *Alexander the Great: King, Commander & Statesman* (Noyes, 1981).


Their rype corne
Their greene corne
Corne newly sprong
Their sitting at meate
The place of solemne prayer
The Tombe of their Herounds standeth
SECOTON
A Ceremony in their prayers with strange iestures and songs dansing about posts carued on the topps lyke mens faces.

Algonquin myths inspired both Longfellow's Hiawatha *and the Brer Rabbit stories. Their religion centred on Nature – the sacred plants, the Great Rabbit, the young girls walking through the fields naked*

ALGONQUIN INDIANS

THE ORIGINAL ALGONQUINS, or 'fish spearers', lived in a single village in Canada, in the area now covered by the city of Ottawa. Later on the name was used for a group of small tribes who allied themselves with the French settlers in Canada against the Iroquois Indians. But these tribes were in fact only the northern division of a larger group of Indian tribes speaking similar languages called the Algonquin (or Algonkian or Algonquian) linguistic group. They ranged along the eastern seaboard of North America and inland to the prairies. They did not realize that they were probably all related and were in a constant state of inter-tribal warfare, which was later complicated by the arrival of the white man.

It was the Algonquin-speaking Indians with whom the first European colonists made contact in the 16th century. The Elizabethan painter John White met them in Virginia and left an invaluable collection of paintings of them. The delightful and intelligent princess Pocahontas, who married an English settler, was one of them. They taught the Pilgrim Fathers to grow maize and hunt turkeys. It was one of their women praying to the *manitous* (spirit beings) in the cornfields who unwittingly set off the Salem witchcraft tragedy (see SALEM). It is an Algonquin mythology which Longfellow used in his *Song of Hiawatha*; the name Hiawatha is that of a great Iroquois Lone Pine chief, but everything else in the narrative poem is Algonquin.

The Holy Fireplace

The Algonquin-speaking tribes practised agriculture and lived more on the produce of their fields of maize and pumpkins than by hunting. Their villages were usually near

Left The Algonquin village of Secoton, from a water-colour by John White. In the foreground are the holy ring of posts and the sacred fire – the place of solemn prayer

Brompton Studio

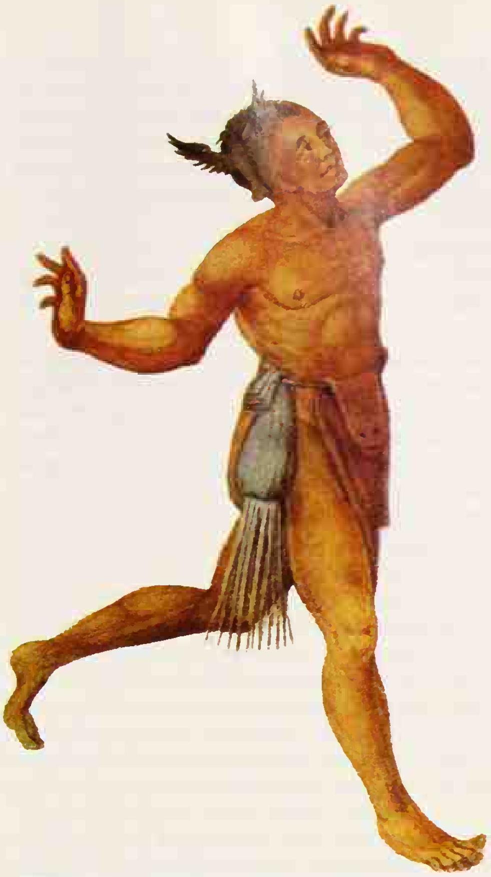
rivers and good fishing grounds. Houses were made from saplings bent into arches, which supported walls and roofs made from sheets of bark. In some villages each house held a single family, in others there were longhouses, large constructions used by several related families, each of which had an individual screened compartment and, very important, a family fireplace. There was something holy about the fireplace, for all the tribespeople understood that fire was the gift of God and in itself was holy. Thus the family fireplace was something of a shrine. In addition, all food was given by God and all food-plants and animals had a living soul.

All villages included sacred dancing grounds where the shamans (medicine-men) met and conducted ceremonies during which they made contact with the spirit world putting the living people of the tribe in touch with the world of their ancestors, and with the great spiritual powers. The Algonquins do not seem to have evolved a special type of building as a temple, but many of the medicine-men, and women too, were inspired by the spirits in their own houses. Such places were regarded with awe but the power was associated with the shaman and not with the building. The real holy places were usually out in the open air, and they were marked by rings of wooden posts carved with heads of ancestors and spirits, as John White drew them in 1587.

The Shaman and the Great Rabbit

The Algonquin tribes as a whole, in common with most American Indians, believed that human contact with the unseen powers came through specially selected individuals. These shamans, or medicine-men, were usually marked out in childhood by some unusual psychological features. They might experience visions, suffer epileptic fits, show homosexual tendencies, dress in women's clothes, or go away alone for long periods. No doubt a modern psychiatrist could have made them normal citizens, but in their own culture they were regarded as facing difficulties sent from the spirit world to which they were thought to be closer than ordinary men. They were usually sent to study further as assistants to well-known shamans. Sometimes they lost their strange magical personalities when they reached puberty; but many passed on to become shamans of importance.

The medicine-men were intermediaries between the people and the spirits, which at times took possession of them. Each had his own branch of magic in which he specialized, and could call on brother shamans to help on special occasions. They were expected to help the tribespeople in all seasons of difficulty. They healed the sick, found lost property, smelled out evil magic, forecast the weather, and consoled the family in time of death. Yet they never became great chiefs. They were too unstable to be trusted with power, but their ability to see into the future was used to assist a chief to assess the value of his line of policy (see also SHAMAN).



Brompton Studio

'The Flyer', an Algonquin medicine-man, by John White. He is acting out the myth of the bird which carries messages between the earth and the world of spirits. He has a dried bird on his head, and the otter skin at his belt contains magic charms

John White painted a picture of a shaman in 'The Flyer'. The shaman is dancing and lifting himself as if he were a bird. His balletic action is magically aided by a dried bird attached to his hair, and no doubt by the magic charms in the otter skin tucked in his belt. But for all the apparent freedom of his dance, he is expressing part of a well-defined group of religious myths. He is the bird which arises from earth, as it did once from the waters before the earth was born. He rises to the world of the manitous from which he will return bringing messages to the people.

The Singer of Paradise

Chipiapoos, protector of the Land of the Dead in Algonquin myth, is the gentle singer of *Hiawatha*.

Most beloved by Hiawatha
Was the gentle Chibiabos,
He the best of all musicians,
He the sweetest of all singers.
Beautiful and childlike was he,
Brave as man is, soft as woman,
Pliant as a wand of willow,
Stately as a deer with antlers...
All the many sounds of nature
Borrowed sweetness from his singing;
All the hearts of men were softened
By the pathos of his music;
For he sang of peace and freedom,
Sang of beauty, love and longing;
Sang of death, and life undying
In the Islands of the Blessed,
In the kingdom of Ponemah,
In the land of the hereafter.

Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha*

The shaman's dance was most likely a round dance, just as the ceremonial posts around the sacred ground were set in a circle. This was natural enough, because he was concerned with the circuit of the heavens. The circular movement of the zodiac constellations around the sky was seen as a procession of the heavenly powers. Among them moved the sun, who was not only a manitou of power but a form of the strange creator spirit, who was also conceived as a great rabbit or a white hare.

In the more recent days of Negro slavery in America, some of the slaves from Ashanti in West Africa mixed with Indians of Algonquin stock, amalgamated their own spirit Anansi, famous as a trickster, with the Algonquin Great Rabbit, and so produced the world of the Brer Rabbit stories.

The Battle of the Brothers

Important among the Algonquin-speaking tribes were the Cree of the Great Lakes and southern Canada, and their neighbours to the south, the Chippewa (Ojibway). Among these tribes, who to a large extent escaped the colonial wars between the Europeans, the old mythology survived long enough to be recorded by scientific scholars. The survival of the old ideas was greatly helped by the secret society of the shamans known as the Midewiwin. This society had a method of writing in pictorial code. Their pictures, scratched on birch-bark or painted on skin, recorded the legends of the gods, and also notes on tribal history.

It is from the Cree in particular that we have the most complete form of the myths of the Algonquin-speaking peoples. Before the earth existed, there was water, on which a few floating sticks were placed by two ducks. The animals came along and could find no solid ground to stand on; those who were able joined the ducks and dived to find more sticks. They made a raft on which they all lived. Then the Great Manitou placed some sand on the raft. It grew and spread out. In his form of a white hare he is still making the raft which is the earth bigger, and you hear him shaking the raft whenever there is an earthquake.

It came about that Death was sent to earth. As different groups of animals died, the Creator took their bodies and changed them so that the first races of men came into being. There was a daughter of the children of men and she gave birth to four divine sons. They were Nanabozo, the protector of humanity; Chipiapoos, who died to become the protector of the Land of the Dead; Wabosso, the maker of white, the magician and guardian of the North; and Chakekenapok, the flint-stone and maker of fire but also the winter. At his birth, the mother died. Thus Chakekenapok and Nanabozo were destined to become enemies.

It was not until Nanabozo had grown up that the two opposed brothers met. Then they stormed around the earth, wrestling and tearing at each other. The magic deerhorn which Nanabozo carried broke pieces off the body of Chakekenapok. These fell to the ground as pieces of flint, and at last Nanabozo won the battle. Chakekenapok was torn to pieces and thrown over the earth. His bones became the ranges of mountains and his intestines turned into the pleasant grapevines.

There was a power granted by the Creator, which the Indians knew as a kind of magic breath called *orenda* (see also AIR; BREATH). This was available to all the manitous, who were the secret life of every created thing. Seeing that Nanabozo and his most beloved brother Chipiapoos had become so powerful and beautiful, the various manitous planned to kill them. Nanabozo knew all things and was able to elude the spells, but Chipiapoos walked on the thick ice of the Great Lakes and the manitous used their orenda to melt the ice. So Chipiapoos drowned and the manitous hid his body at the very bottom of the lakes from which it could never be recovered.

For six years Nanabozo wept for his brother in seclusion, and sent out his magical powers to destroy the manitous. At last they managed to pacify him by sending their orenda in bags to blow on him like soothing winds. They brought peace to his heart. Four of the greater manitous brought mourning gifts, tobacco and magical medicine pouches made from animal skins. Nanabozo welcomed them as messengers of peace and accepted their invitation to visit their sacred house. There they gave him a drink which brought him peace and happiness. Then they combined to form the society of the Midewiwin, and Nanabozo was the first initiate. They all summoned up the spirit of Chipiapoos and, before sending him back to the underworld, they invested him with the powers of Lord of the Land of the Dead and Guardian of Souls.

The Sacred Plants

It was Nanabozo who discovered the magical virtues of the plants which were to be the food of the future human race of our own kind. He stored them in his magical hut, and put the Grandmother of Humanity, Mesakkummikokwi, in charge of them. And so, when the Algonquins picked the food plants, they put a portion of their reaping on the ground as a thank-offering to the ancient lady, 'Our Grandmother'.

Among the Algonquin tribes these and other myths were re-enacted at ceremonies on the anniversary of each event; in other words, at the appropriate seasons for planting maize, hunting deer or reaping the harvest. The timing of the ceremonies was calculated by counting moons and days, so that a practical calendar was linked with their religion. The passage of the stars across the sky marked the great seasons of the year, which were six in number.

The dancing and chanting of the myths at these ceremonies were linked with Nature's progress through the seasons of the year. It was a kind of magical drama. The power summoned up and released in the ceremonies helped the people to enjoy the fruits of earth and protected them from the dangerous powers of manitous.

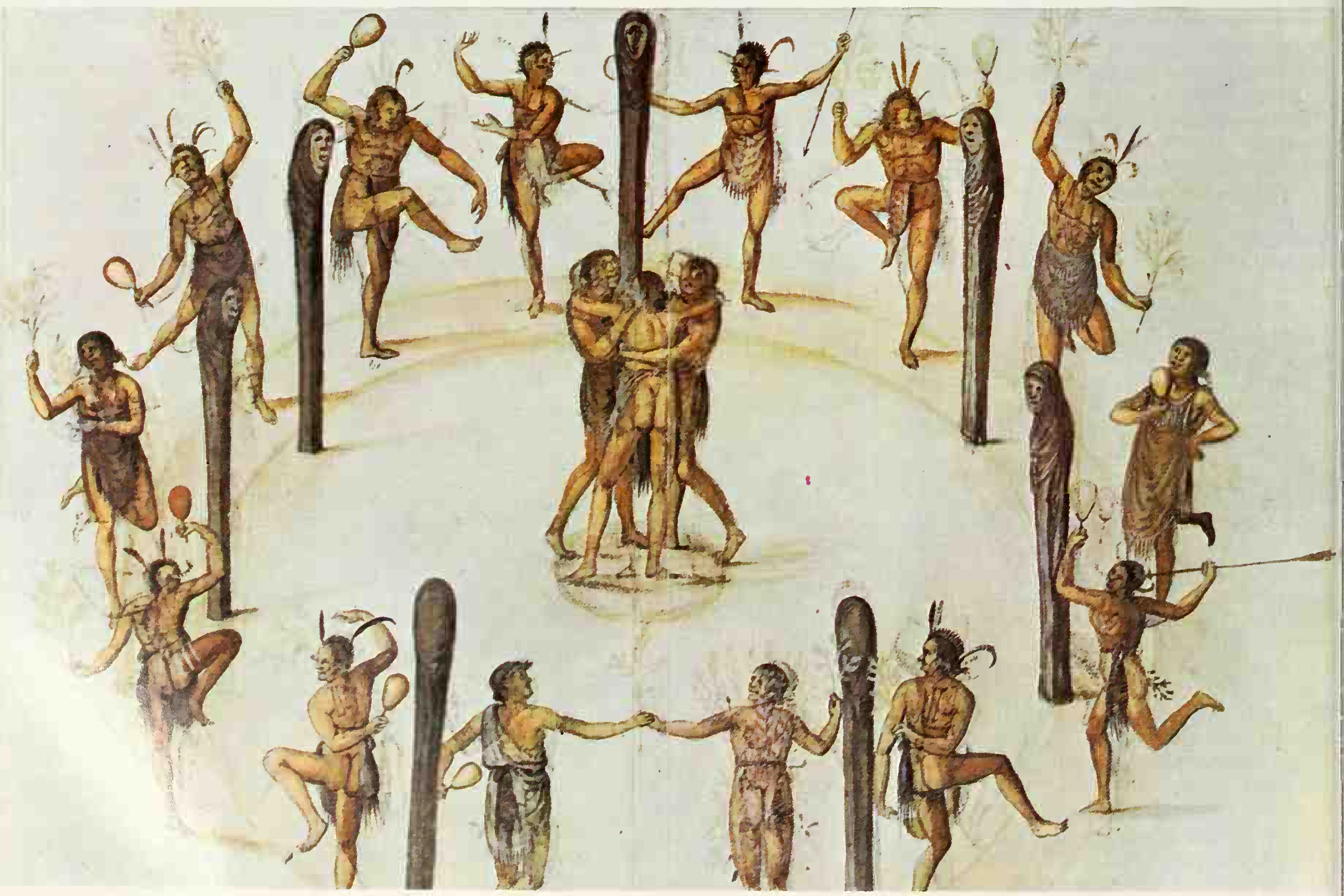
Agriculture was always a holy thing. The little garden plots which went to make up the village farmland were given magical life by young women silently walking around them on a given night in spring, quite naked, and so expressing the fertility of Nature which they were summoning to their assistance.

The Indians understood well enough that they depended on the powers of Nature for their existence; if there was a poor harvest, a drought, an earthquake – they died. They taught this to the early white settlers but found that the newcomers rewarded good with evil. Though the tribes detested any central authority, the pressure of the white man who seized their lands drove the chiefs to organize large confederations for resistance. On the eastern seaboard the struggle ended with the war of 1675-6, when the Algonquins were decisively defeated, massacred and driven from their heartland.

C.A.BURLAND

FURTHER READING: C. A. Burland, *North American Indian Mythology* (Hamlyn, 1967); F. R. Johnson, *Algonquians, the Indians of the Part of the New World First Visited by the English*, Vols. 1 & 2 (Johnson NC, 1972).

Below **The religious dance of the Algonquin Indians, by John White. Their holy places were usually in the open and were marked by a ring of wooden posts, which were carved with heads of ancestors and spirits. The rattles and corn are symbols of fertility**



Were the gods astronauts and do alien beings visit the earth? There has been a rash of strange reports since the 1950s

ALIEN VISITORS

IN MANY MYTHOLOGIES the great gods live in the sky or on top of a high mountain, from which they look down and see the doings of human beings on the earth. Sometimes they come down to earth, often in disguise, and intervene in events on the human plane. Early in the Old Testament story the 'sons of God' look down from heaven and see that the daughters of men are fair, so they descend to earth and beget children on them. The Greek gods have numerous amatory encounters with human beings in mythology, and in Norse mythology the god Odin is a frequent wanderer upon the earth. In Jewish, Christian and Moslem tradition, God sends angels to the earth as messengers to men (see ANGELS). The belief that spirits from a different plane can invade human beings' bodies and minds is known all over the world.

This ancient theme has taken on a new lease of life in the theory that travellers from outer space visited the earth in spaceships in the past and intervened in earthly matters. They are credited with using their superior knowledge and technique to teach the earthlings and create the basis of human civilization. The awed earthlings regarded the visitants as gods and weaved mythologies about them. These alien visitors are still coming, it is claimed, and there are reports of them being seen by human beings, communicating with members of our species and sometimes abducting or 'spacenapping' people.

Visitor from Venus

All sorts of strange things have been seen, or imagined, in the sky for centuries past – armies marching in the clouds, airy chariots, pillars of flame, wheels, bow-shaped objects, globes and flying crosses. In 1646 in England many 'honest, sober and civil persons and men of good credit' were reported to have seen men struggling in the air and tugging at each other, one of them holding a drawn sword. In 1878 a farmer in Texas used a significant word in describing something bright orange he had seen in the sky, moving very fast. He said it was 'the size of a large saucer and evidently at great height'.

The expression 'flying saucer' did not come into general use until a man named Kenneth Arnold saw nine mysterious objects flying at blistering speed near Mount Rainier in Washington State in 1947 and described them as looking like 'saucers when skipped over water' (see UFOS). Five years later, in 1952, or so he claimed, a Californian named George Adamski met an alien from a flying saucer which had come from Venus. The alien stood about 5ft 6in tall, was blond, tanned and long-haired, wore a brown uniform without pockets or fasteners and struck Adamski as beautiful, loving and profoundly wise. He said he had felt 'like a child in the presence of one with great wisdom and much love.' Communicating with Adamski telepathically, the alien told him that his people on Venus were greatly alarmed by the development of nuclear weapons on earth.

This was a theme which was to recur frequently in accounts of encounters with aliens, who were often credited with the same kind of vaguely uplifting and mushily benevolent sentiments about peace and love as many of the 'spirits' purporting to communicate through mediums and channellers. An opportunity to get high-minded sentiments of this kind across to the public apears to be one of the motives, conscious or unconscious, of many mediums, channellers and alien visitor contactees.

Adamski's experience was reported to the world in 1953 in a book called *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, which sold like hot cakes and brought him much short-term notoriety. He afterwards claimed many more meetings with alien humanoids, but few students of Unidentified Flying Objects have ever taken him seriously. The publicity he gained, however, set off a wave of revelations from other people who claimed to have encountered mysterious beings from outer space.

Hypnosis Has Landed

There was a sensational and significant development when a couple named Betty and Barney Hill were driving through the White Mountains in New Hampshire, in 1961, and saw a large object shaped like a pancake with windows descend from the sky. They forgot what happened next, but they found themselves further down the road than they could account for and they seemed to have lost two hours of time. They both began to experience disturbing dreams. In 1963 they consulted a psychiatrist in Boston and under hypnosis they 'remembered' what had happened to them. They said they were taken on board the spacecraft, undressed and medically examined by the crew – aliens who were about 5ft tall, hairless, with blue-grey skin, pear-shaped heads, domed foreheads and slanting, catlike eyes. The aliens came from a star named Zeta Reticulii. They were fascinated by Barney Hill's false teeth and, apparently, they took a sperm sample from him and subjected Betty to a pregnancy test.

The psychiatrist had no doubt that the Hills were fantasizing, but their story was written up in a successful book and later made into a film. The Hill case set an unfortunate precedent for the use of regression hypnosis (see REGRESSION) to elicit supposedly suppressed memories of 'encounters of the fourth kind', which have too often been accepted as gospel despite their unverifiability and the lack of corroborating evidence. It also sparked off theories about the extraterrestrials conducting human breeding programmes, which seem to have ministered to a need deep in human psychology.

'We Shall Return'

Not all the reported cases have needed hypnosis to bring them back to memory, by any means. In 1957, Antonio Villas Boas, a 23-year-old Brazilian, was ploughing a field at night – to escape the ferocious heat of the day – when something descended to the ground close to him and small creatures emerged. They were about 5ft tall and wore 'space suits' with helmets and breathing apparatus. They seized him and took him to their spacecraft, where his clothes were stripped off and a strange-looking naked woman, red-haired, fair-skinned and high-cheekboned, made forcible love to him. Afterwards she pointed to her belly and then to the sky, evidently meaning that she would bear his baby in her own world far away among the stars. His clothes were given back to him and he was shown round the strange beings' craft before they finally let him go.

The sexual motif in this account, reminiscent of much of the world's heritage of mythology, was one which has recurred frequently. Serious students of UFOs were unhappy with the publicity given to the story when it came to public attention in 1964. They did not believe it and feared it would bring the whole subject into disrepute. A doctor who examined Villas Boas in Rio de Janeiro in 1958, however, was favourably impressed by him and said he showed symptoms consistent with exposure to radiation.

Many more stories of alien visitors emerged from South America. In Chile, in 1977, a patrol of six young soldiers and a corporal in the early hours of the morning saw lights in the sky. An object landed not far away from them and the corporal, telling the others to stay put, walked towards it in the darkness. They waited anxiously for 15 minutes until the corporal returned. He was in a strange, trance-like state, mumbling to himself, 'You do not know who we are or where we come from, but I tell you we shall return.' Then he passed out.

At dawn the soldiers were surprised to see several days' growth of beard on the corporal's face and to discover that his digital watch showed a date five days ahead. They took him down to the town of Putre, where the authorities hushed up the whole affair. All the corporal would say when he was at last allowed to talk to the media was that he could not remember what had happened. The detail about the date on the watch recalls old traditions about fairylands and spiritual realms where time runs differently from on earth.

The Astronaut Gods

In the late 1960s and for a time in the 1970s a Swiss author, Erich von Däniken, made himself a fortune and attracted excited attention in the media with a series of books in which he maintained that far in the remote past, some 10,000 years ago, the earth had been visited by advanced beings from outer space who created the human race in their own image by altering the genes of monkeys. These early astronauts were worshipped as gods by their creation and the world's mythologies and sacred books are disguised accounts of their period on earth. He cited various ancient artefacts as 'proof' of his theories, including the Olmec heads of ancient Mexico, the Easter Island statues, the mysterious Nazca lines of Peru and the Great Pyramid of Egypt.

Von Däniken's first book, *Chariots of the Gods?*, came out in German in 1967 and proved to be a best-seller in 26 different languages, which included Bengali, Chinese and Hebrew as well as English, but his 'evidence' proved lamentably unconvincing. The craze presently died away, but it had demonstrated the urgent need with which many people, at a time of declining confidence in the established religions, wanted to believe in powerful superhuman forces at work in the universe.

Alien Corn

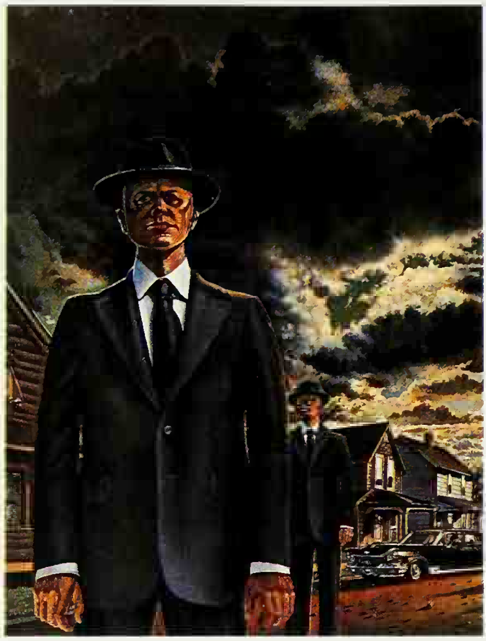
Many observers have pointed out the link between reported contacts with alien intruders and science fiction. Long before the 1950s and the subsequent crop of stories of abductions and rapes, writers like Jules Verne, H.G.Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs and an army of pulp fiction authors had told vivid stories of alien beings coming to earth. In 1951, the year before George Adamski supposedly met his amiable Venusian, the film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* had well-intentioned aliens coming to earth and landing in Washington DC to warn the world of the danger of war. In 1953, the film *Invaders From Mars* probably helped to stimulate the rash of reports of unfriendly aliens landing and kidnapping humans.

One of the unsatisfactory things about the reports is that the aliens' appearance varies so enormously. They are sometimes tall and sometimes short, sometimes fat and sometimes thin, sometimes furry and sometimes hairless. They may have long arms or short arms, large heads or small heads or no heads at all, slanting eyes or goggle eyes. Some of them are diminutive figures recalling the fairies and goblins of traditional European folklore.

In 1976 two women in County Durham, England, described aliens they claimed to have seen as little creatures only 18 inches tall, with long white hair and huge eyes. In 1978 there was an abduction involving three adults and two children in Oxfordshire, England. Under hypnotic regression, one of the children described the aliens as small, goblin-like creatures with big ears, but the others said they were human in appearance, tall and fair with blue eyes, wearing silver suits and black shoes, but with unnaturally large ears.

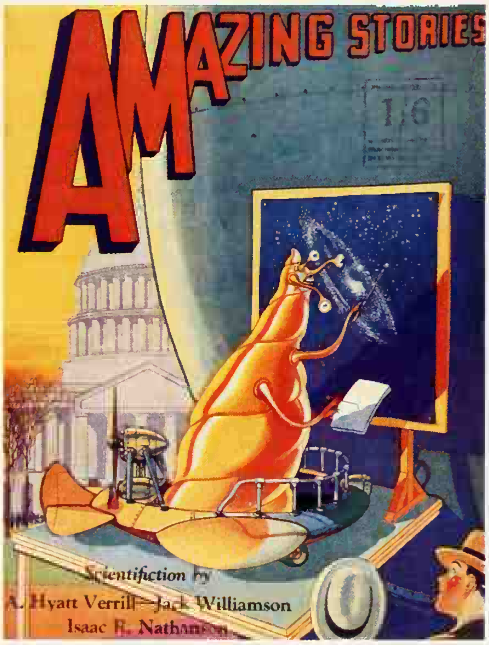
It is hard to believe that aliens from so many different civilizations are busy dropping in on the earth and difficult not to conclude that they do not come from outer space at all, but from the inner spaces of the human mind. Again, however, they do reflect the age-old human need for otherworldly figures and, although some of them are all sweetness and light, others are evil. One persistent motif is that of the Men in Black, sinister bureaucrats who arrive on the scene after an abduction is over and warn the victims to keep quiet. They may be aliens themselves or zombie-like humans in league with the aliens (see MEN IN BLACK).

Extra-terrestrials seem to have penetrated even behind the Iron Curtain. In 1989 Tass reported a claim that three 10ft humanoids with tiny heads and three eyes apiece, wearing silver suits and accompanied by a robot, had landed at Voronezh in a spaceship like a shining ball. Several children claimed to have seen them, but were unable to back up their story.



Mary Evans Picture Library

Alien visitors, according to the descriptions of those who claim to have met them, can take many varied forms: most human, and perhaps most menacing, are the Men in Black (*above*), but few are as bizarre as the space invaders of imaginative fiction (*below*)



Mary Evans Picture Library

'Take Me To Your Larder'

This headline topped media reports in Britain of a case in 1979 which had its comical aspects. A 45-year-old woman in the West Midlands saw her husband off to work as usual at seven one morning and thought she saw a light in the garden. She looked to see if the carport light was on, but it was not, so she thought no more of it. She put down food for the family Alsatian dog and called him. When the dog came in from the garden, he flopped down, glassy-eyed as if he had been drugged. Then suddenly, with a strange buzzing noise, three extraordinary creatures flew through the kitchen and into the lounge. They were only about 36in tall and had white, waxy faces and black eyes, with thin slits of mouths and no eyebrows. They had wings and wore silvery clothes.

The woman found herself floating involuntarily into the lounge where she had to shield her eyes from glowing light. The three peculiar intruders were attentively examining the ornaments on the Christmas tree. They probed into her mind telepathically, telling her not to be afraid as they would not harm her, and that they came from the sky. She told them that the decorations were up to celebrate the birthday of Jesus and they telegraphed back that they knew all about Jesus.

She gave them mince pies, but they did not eat them. They said they often came 'down here' to talk to people, but people did not seem to be interested. When she lit a cigarette, they seemed terrified and dashed off, each of them taking a mince pie. Outside she saw them go into an egg-shaped object, which took off. She found that the electric clock in the house had stopped and that all her cassette tapes were magnetized and unplayable. Her eyes were sore and she felt sick for a week.

Alien Communions

The American novelist Whitley Strieber believed that he had been visited by alien beings on numerous occasions. They were of different physical types. Some were short and stocky with broad faces, deep-set eyes, pug noses and wide mouths. Others were about 5ft tall, slender and delicate, with slanted, prominent and mesmerizing black eyes, and only a vestigial nose and mouth. There were smaller ones with round black eyes like buttons. The beings subjected him to thorough, painful and unpleasant physical examination. They also injected something into his brain.

The book describing his experiences, *Communion*, came out in 1987, was hyped in the media and duly proved to be a successful seller. Unfortunately it was entirely based on 'memories' elicited under hypnosis. Jenny Randles, the British investigator, has commented on 'the almost wild and semi-hysterical zeal' with which believers in alien abduction greet figures like Strieber and Kathie Davis (an American abductee who claimed to have been made pregnant by an alien and had her unborn foetus taken from her body by aliens to be brought up elsewhere). Casting doubt on claims of this kind offends the need to believe, but the belief itself may be extremely dangerous. In 1986 a case was reported in England in which two small girls were murdered by their grandmother, who allegedly believed it the only way to save them from aliens who were trying to beam them up into space.

FURTHER READING: J. Spencer and H. Evans ed, *Phenomenon: From Flying Saucers to UFOs* (Macdonald, 1988); Richard Hall, *Uninvited Guests* (Aurora Press, 1988); J. Randles, *Abduction* (Hale, 1988); E. Fiore, *Abductions* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989).

Hallowe'en now is mainly celebrated by children, especially in the United States. But their weird and grinning masks echo the terrors inspired by the old festival of All Hallows, when the dead came out from their graves to walk the earth.

ALL HALLOWS' EVE

ALL HALLOWS' EVE, or Hallowe'en, was originally a festival of fire and the dead and the powers of darkness. It is the evening of 31 October, the night before the Christian festival of All Hallows' or All Saints' Day. All Hallows' Day commemorates the saints and martyrs, and was first introduced in the 7th century. Its date was changed from 13 May to 1 November in the following century, probably to make it coincide with and Christianize a pagan festival of the dead. All Souls' Day in the Roman Catholic calendar is 2 November. It is marked by prayers for the souls of the dead.

It is only in recent times that Hallowe'en has been reduced to a minor jollification for children. Before the coming of Christianity, the pagan Celts in northern Europe held two great fire festivals each year – Beltane on the eve of 1 May and Samhain on the eve of 1 November – to mark the beginning of summer and winter. These dates have no connection with the equinoxes or solstices, or with sowing and reaping, but seem to date from very early times when Celtic society depended heavily on cattle for subsistence. Samhain marked the beginning of winter and was the time when the cattle were brought in from pasture to spend the winter under cover. It was also the beginning of a new year. Because the Celtic day started at sunset, and ran to the following sunset, the festival began on the eve of 1 November.

Sir James Frazer said in *The Golden Bough* that 'throughout Europe, Hallowe'en, the night which marks the transition from autumn to winter, seems to have been of old the time of year when the souls of the departed were supposed to revisit their old homes in order to warm themselves by the fire and to comfort themselves with the good cheer provided for them in the kitchen or the parlour by their affectionate kinsfolk. It was, perhaps, a natural thought that the approach of winter should drive the poor shivering hungry ghosts from the bare fields and the leafless woodlands to the shelter of the cottage with its familiar fireside.'

Bonfires on high hills were a conspicuous feature of the old Hallowe'en rites, though in England they have been gradually transferred to 5 November to mark the arrest of Guy Fawkes. In the 1860s a traveller in Scotland counted 30 fires on the hilltops between Dunkeld and Aberfeldy, each with a circle of people dancing round it. Down to the end of the 19th century fires blazed on the hills in Lancashire on the eve of All Hallows. In north Wales every family built a bonfire and each person threw into the ashes a white stone which he had previously marked. Prayers were said round the fire and next morning if a stone was missing, it was thought that its owner would die before he saw another Hallowe'en. The same belief existed in the Scottish Highlands and many forms of fortune telling were a traditional feature of Hallowe'en – probably because it was the Celtic New Year's Day and so a suitable time for predicting the events of the coming year.

In Aberdeenshire and Buchan in the 19th century, boys collecting fuel for the bonfire would ask for 'a peat to burn the witches'. When the fire was lit, the boys danced round it shouting 'Fire! Fire! Burn the witches.' When the fire died down, the ashes were scattered and when the last spark had gone out, the cry went up in the ominous darkness 'The devil take the hindmost' and they all ran for their lives. In Wales 'the cropped black sow' would take the hindmost.

Hallowe'en

The mouth of the night is the choice hour of the *Sluath*, the Host of the Dead, whose feet never touch the earth, as they go drifting in the wind till the Day of Burning; of the *Fuath*, the Spirit of Terror that frightens folk out of the husk of their hearts; of the Washer, who sits with herself in the twilight; of the slim green-coated ones, the Water-Horse, and what not. The light that is shadowless, colourless, softer than moonlight, is ever the light of their liking. At the mouth of the night, along the water-courses by ways that at the hour of dusk and of lateness you had best be shunning, you are like to meet them; to west of houses they pass – what to do, who shall say? their ways being nowise human.

Amy Murray *Father Allan's Island*

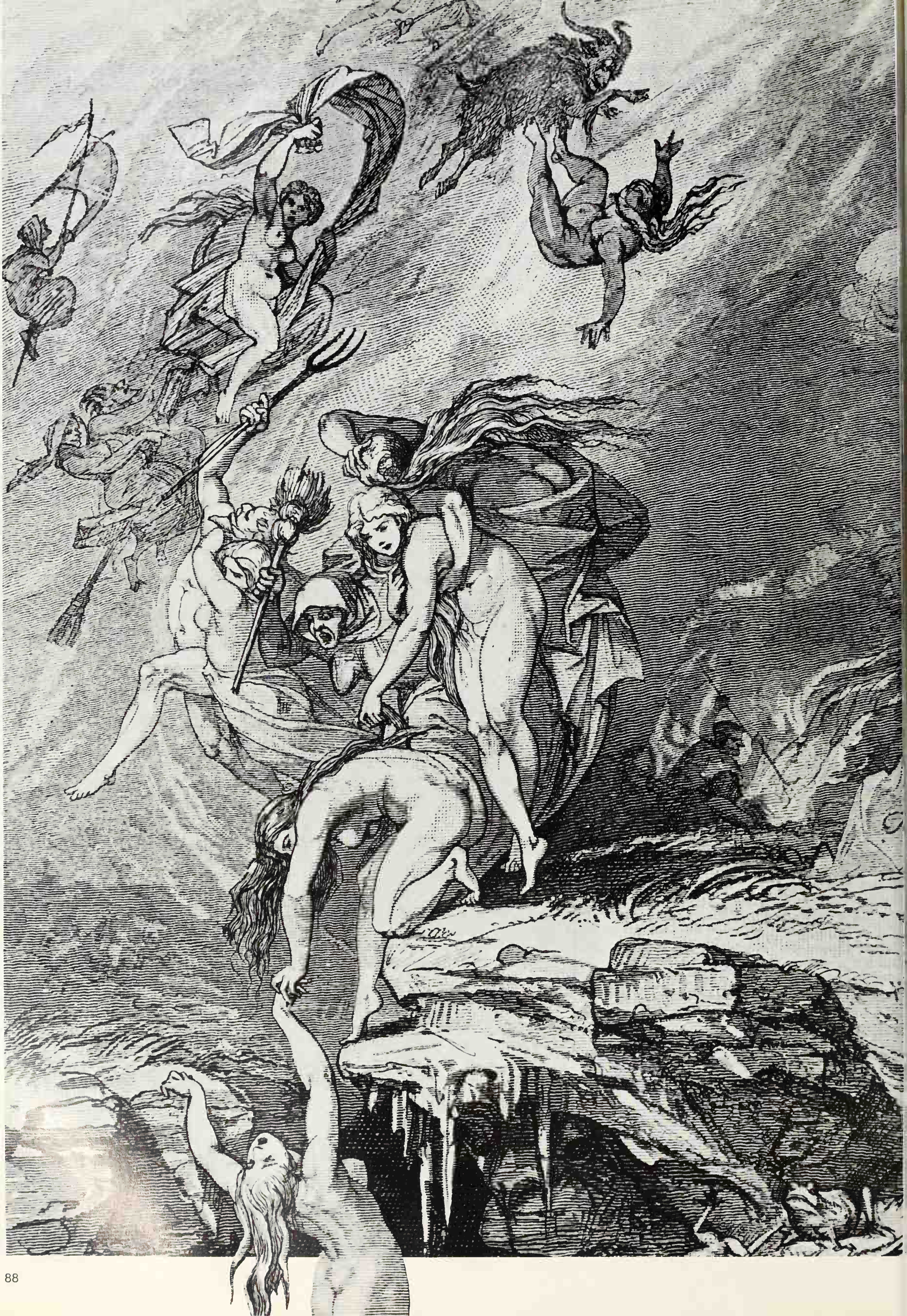
From the Wintry Grave

Originally the bonfires were probably meant to provide light and heat which would help the sun through the winter, when it seemed to grow feeble under the attack of darkness and cold. Winter called to mind the chill blackness of the grave and in many parts of Europe – not only in Celtic countries – All Hallows' Eve, as the beginning of winter and the dying time of the old year, was a night when the dead stalked the countryside. Offerings of food and drink were put out for the ghosts. They passed by to the west always, the direction of the dying sun at sunset.

The fairies could also be seen on All Hallows' Eve, moving from one fairy hill to another with the music of bells and elf-horns. They were sometimes identified with the dead. There is an old Irish story about a young man who incautiously stayed out on Hallowe'en and met a band of fairies. They welcomed him cheerfully and gave him wine and fairy gold. But when he looked closely at them, he saw that they were neighbours who had died – some of them many years before. They shrieked with laughter when he recognized them and tried to tug him into their dance. Terrified, he struggled against them until he dropped unconscious. He woke in the morning lying inside a stone circle, his

Snark International

Hallowe'en, originally a festival of fire and the dead, is today more likely to be celebrated by children, even though the dead may still be remembered: sugared skeletons for the feast of All Souls in Mexico



Jacqueline Mackay

Michael Busselle

***Facing page* Medieval witches ride on their way to the sabbath *Above left* A modern practitioner of Wicca casts herbs and incense into her cauldron *Above right* Children with Hallowe'en masks, or 'Jack o' Lanterns'**

rms black and blue with the marks of ingers.

Darker and colder creatures still roamed hrough the night on Hallowe'en – demons nd hobgoblins, witches who straddled roomsticks or shankbones, flew in sieves or gg-shells, or rode on coal-black horses. The ires helped to keep them off and at Balmoral n Queen Victoria's time the effigy of a ideous old witch was ceremoniously burned n a bonfire at Hallowe'en.

The guisers went from house to house, inging and dancing. Their blood-curdling masks and grotesque costumes may have een meant to keep evil at bay or, more ikely, were a visible representation of the hosts and goblins that lurked in the night. The masks have now been transferred to the children who, in the United States, visit the neighbours for the food-offerings which once belonged to the dead – or play tricks akin to the legendary destructiveness of witches and imps abroad on this night.

Witches' Revels

Real witches held high revel on All Hallows' Eve and this was one of the ways in which they preserved pagan customs. The witches of Aberdeen in 1596 said that they had danced round the market cross at midnight on Hallowe'en and also round an old grey stone at the foot of the hill at Craigleuch, the Devil himself playing music before them.

Modern witches have kept up the tradition. In 1963, for instance, a journalist watched the Hallowe'en festivities of a coven of witches at St Albans. The high priestess, naked except for a string of beads and watched by the other 12 members of the coven, drew a circle on the ground with the point of her magic knife. A candle burned in each quarter of the circle, with a fifth candle on an altar in the middle. The reporter did not reveal the details of the ceremony but he did record a remark of the high priestess. 'We are not anti-Christian', she said, 'we just have other means of spiritual satisfaction. It's hard to describe that satisfaction.'

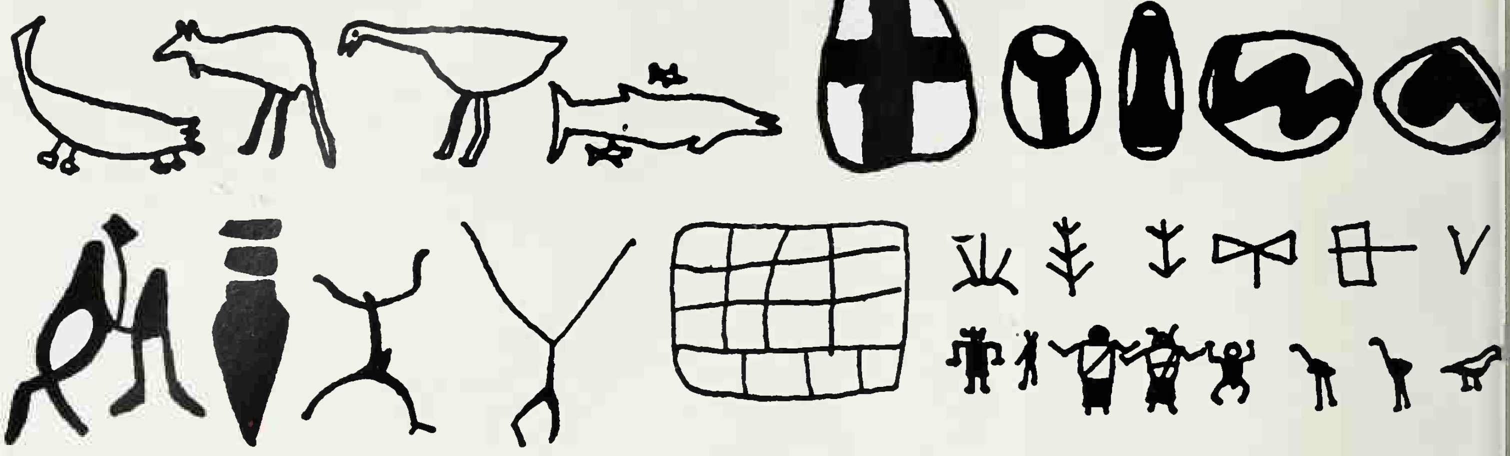
Alligator

ndian tribes of the tropical Americas have many gods in the orm of alligators, native to those regions. In North America the Choctaws venerated the alligator and would not kill it; the Chickasaws devoted a major ceremonial dance to it: in the southern United States, alligator teeth were used to help a baby's teething, to cure snakebite and to keep witches away; an old North Carolina superstition says that alligator gall helps sore eyes, and that the fat can cure cancer. See LIZARDS.

Aloes

Fragrant wood, valued in antiquity for its pleasing smell and recommended in magical textbooks for operations connected with Jupiter and the sun: bitter aloes, made from a different plant, is a purgative drug and therefore a symbol of spiritual cleansing, purgatory.

N.H.P.A.



Prehistoric forms of writing from Australia, Italy, Crete and California. They were thought to be an invention of the gods, and were probably connected with magical and ritual practices

Christian priests forbade the use of runes, the letters of the old northern European alphabet, because the runes were so closely connected with paganism and magic. This is one example of the age-old belief in the magic power of letters

ALPHABET

WRITING IS a mysterious and magical art. In many primitive and ancient societies it was assumed that the gods must have invented this marvellous method of capturing speech and turning it into visible form. In the ancient world the fact that most people could not write, or read what was written, and that those who could were usually priests, brought writing a reputation as a great hidden wisdom. And its use in inscriptions on the tombs of the dead gave it a close connection with the other world.

The Egyptians called the picture-writing which they carved on the walls of tombs and temples, 'the speech of the gods'. The Greeks called the Egyptian letters hieroglyphics, 'sacred carvings'. Because they came from the gods and because they were pictures, the hieroglyphs had magical powers. One of the basic laws of magic is that a symbol does not merely refer to the thing it represents; it actually *is* the thing.

In Egypt, for instance, a hieroglyph which was a picture of an animal sometimes had to be used in an inscription inside a tomb. It was feared that it might come alive and the animal might eat the food provided for the dead man, or even eat the dead man himself. To prevent this, the hieroglyph would be left incomplete or drawn in two halves, so that the whole animal could not appear.

The Whispering Runes

The letters used in northern Europe in the early centuries after Christ were also powerful in magic. They were called runes (see RUNES), which comes from a root meaning 'mystery, secret', surviving in the modern German word *raunen*, 'to whisper'. The art of writing with a pen did not reach northern Europe until Christian missionaries brought it with them from the south, and the runes were carved – on wood, tombstones, jewels, swords and armour and other equipment. Inside a tomb, it was thought runes would keep evil forces away from the dead. Or sometimes they were meant to stop the corpse from creeping out of its grave. They were cut on tombstones to prevent people from destroying them or stealing them for their own dead. Part of an inscription on a Swedish gravestone says, 'This is the meaning of the runes; I hid here magic runes undisturbed by evil witchcraft. He who destroys this monument shall die in misery by magic art.'

This inscription would serve by itself to bring the gravestone's destroyer to a miserable end. Because in magic a symbol is what it stands for, to write down a wish or a curse in symbols automatically gives effect to what is written. In the same way, runes were cut on swords to make them irresistible in battle, as in the case of a sword named Marr – 'may Marr spare nobody'.

The poem called *Havamal* (Utterance of the High One) says that runes have the power to bring the dead to life:

A twelfth (spell) I know; when I see aloft
upon a tree
A corpse swinging from a rope,
Then I cut and paint runes
So that the man walks
And speaks with me.

To win mastery of the runes, the god Odin had to hang for nine days and nights in agony, transfixed by a spear to the World Tree – the ash Yggdrasill (see ASH). At the end of this torture he saw the runes and seized them:

I peered downwards,
I took up the runes,
Screaming, I took them –
Then I fell back.

Christian priests condemned the use of runes because they were so closely linked with pagan religion and magic. As late as the 17th century in Iceland, people were burnt to death because they had been found in possession of runes.

Development of the Alphabet

The earliest known forms of writing go back to about 20,000 BC and were drawn on the walls of caves. They were pictures of animals and men, and also geometric shapes and patterns. Nobody can be sure of their meaning but they probably had some religious and magical significance.

Broadly speaking, the development of systems of writing runs through three main stages. First comes pictographic writing, which means simply drawing pictures. For instance, • can mean 'the sun' and ★ 'star'. Next, in ideographic writing the picture's meaning broadens out to include ideas associated with the thing shown. Now • means not only 'the sun' but also 'light' and 'heat', which come from the sun, and 'day' over which the sun presides. And ★ can come to mean not only 'star' but 'heaven' and 'god'.

The trouble with ideographic writing is not merely that the same picture may have several different meanings, which causes confusion, but also that there are a great many words in any language which cannot easily be represented in pictures. The next step is the introduction of phonetic symbols, which stand for sounds.

Phonetic writing can be extraordinarily complicated. There are some 50,000 Chinese symbols which stand for different sounds or combinations of sounds. The triumph of the development of an alphabet – a triumph of simplicity – is the use of a small number of symbols which can be used in combination with each other to represent all the words of a language. 'For this achievement,' David Diringer says, 'simple as it now seems to us, the inventor, or the inventors, are to be ranked among the greatest benefactors of mankind.' It is not surprising that this brilliant invention was regarded long ago as sacred and magical.

Diringer's theory is that all the world's alphabets are descended from one original alphabet, invented somewhere in the area of Syria and Palestine, the land-bridge between the great civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, in the period 1750-1500 BC.

In the European magical tradition, far and away the most important of all alphabets is the Hebrew, which was written from right to left and had 22 letters, all of which were consonants. No vowels (our a, e, i, o and u) were represented. The same is true of the Phoenician alphabet, from which our own alphabet is descended, by way of the Greek, Etruscan and Latin alphabets.

The importance of the Hebrew alphabet

comes from the fact that God is described in the Bible as creating the world by expressing commands in words – 'God said, Let there be light; and there was light.' It was believed that when God pronounced the word light, light itself instantly sprang into existence. And all the other things which God made came into existence as he pronounced their names.

But what language did God speak? Obviously, Hebrew. And so the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet came to be regarded as supremely powerful magical instruments, through which the whole universe had been created and which contained the secret of the structure of all things.

This belief was one of the basic ideas of the Cabala – a complicated web of mystical and magical theories, originally Jewish but adopted with enthusiasm by non-Jewish occultists from Reuchlin and Agrippa in the 16th century to Aleister Crowley in the 20th (see CABALA).

The cabalistic *Sefer Yetsirah* (Book of Creation) written by an unknown author, probably between the 3rd and 6th centuries AD, describes – if its at times impenetrable language can properly be said to 'describe' anything – how God created the world by means of numbers and letters: the numbers from 1 to 10, and the 22 Hebrew letters, 'the foundation of all things'. God 'drew' the letters, 'hewed them, combined them, weighed them, interchanged them and through them produced the whole creation and everything that is destined to be created.'

In cabalistic theory, God created the world by extending his own being. The *Sefer Yetsirah* says that 'the production of all things from the 22 letters is the proof that they are all parts of one body.' In other words, the letters are parts of 'one body' – the alphabet – and all created things, made by means of the letters, are also parts of 'one body' which is God.

It is not a long step from this to reach the equation, God = the universe = the Hebrew alphabet. Some theorists saw the Hebrew letters as parts or aspects of God, and so they were suitable objects of meditation; for a full understanding of the letters in all their innumerable combinations, if such a thing were possible, would be a full understanding of God. Arranged in different combinations with each other, the letters threw light on the complexities of God's nature, and on the complexities of the universe.

To magicians, Jewish and non-Jewish, the Hebrew letters were sources of power, the divine power, which created the world. Magicians employed them in suitable combinations to bring the power of God to bear on summoning up a spirit or reviving a corpse or finding buried treasure.

An example is the powerful word Agla, which is made of the initial letters of the Hebrew phrase *Aieth Gadol Leolam Adonai*, 'Thou art mighty for ever, O Lord.' Agla was written inside magic circles to give the magician mighty power to control spirits, and it also had a particular use as a fire-extinguisher. If written on a wooden plate and thrown into a fire, it would put the fire out. Medieval German Jews explained this use of the word by expanding it into the initial letters of *Allmächtiger Gott, Lösch' Aus*, 'Almighty God, extinguish it.'

ATA

The Björkertorpstone, Sweden: the inscription in runes, the letters once used throughout northern Europe, is a spell intended to kill whoever disturbs the monument

Though the Hebrew alphabet was particularly important, the older principle of the magic of letters applied to other alphabets as well. The word Azoth, sometimes applied to the Philosopher's Stone of alchemy (see ALCHEMY) and sometimes to the metal mercury, comes from the Arabic name of mercury, *al zauq*, but some alchemists thought that Azoth was a peculiarly effective name for the metal because it combines the first and last letters of the Hebrew, Greek, Roman and Arabic alphabets, and so contains the total magic power of all four. (See also GEMATRIA; NAMES.)

Letters and Correspondences

Observing that God had used the 22 Hebrew letters to create the world, some Jewish and Christian commentators succeeded in calculating that in the first chapter of Genesis God is said to create 22 things, obviously corresponding to the 22 letters. Because the letters were used to make everything that exists, they contain all truth and all wisdom, and Josephus, a Jewish historian of the 1st century AD, and other commentators calculated that the Old Testament, through which God reveals himself to men, has 22 books – though it required some ingenious juggling to reach this figure. It is probably not by chance that there are 22 principal cards or 'major trumps' in the Tarot pack, which are also believed to contain all the secrets of the universe. (See TAROT.)

Following up the theory that the universe was created by means of the letters, the *Sefer Yetsirah* classifies various phenomena of the world in terms of the letters they belong to. Twelve of the Hebrew letters are connected with the 12 signs of the zodiac, the 12 months of the year, 12 organs of the body and 12 'properties' (including sight, hearing, smell, sexual love, work, anger, laughter and sleep). Seven other letters are assigned to the seven directions (east, west, north, south, above, below and the centre), the seven planets known in antiquity, the seven days of the week, the seven 'gates of perception' (the mouth, plus two eyes, ears and nostrils), and seven pairs of opposites (including life and death, peace and war, riches and poverty, wisdom and folly).

The three remaining letters – *mem*, *shin* and *aleph* – are called 'mother letters'. They are connected with three elements or basic materials of which everything is made – water, fire and air; with three divisions of the universe – earth, heaven and the atmosphere between them; with three seasons of the year – winter, summer and spring; and with three parts of the body – belly, head and lungs.

A system of 'correspondences' of this kind, a classification of different phenomena into a set number of categories – as if, to use Aleister Crowley's appropriate analogy, you had to sort all the papers on your desk into a given number of pigeonholes – may seem peculiar, but it is part of the old attempt to make sense of the world by classifying things in groups; just as zoologists classify animals by species for a better understanding of how the animal world works. And there was a logic to the connections. The letter *aleph* (our A) was not a vowel in Hebrew but a 'breathing', a rough exhalation of breath, and it was natural to connect it with the lungs, which breathe, and with air – especially as it was believed that the shape of the letter came from the Egyptian hieroglyph representing an eagle, who was the lord of the air. Similarly, *mem* (our M) was connected with water because the letter was adapted from the Egyptian hieroglyph for 'water'.

In magic, correspondences are used not merely to understand the world but to control it. A commentary on the *Sefer Yetsirah* assigns the letter *kaph* (our K) to Venus, the planet of the love-goddess. A magician might wear the letter embroidered on his robes or hold it drawn on parchment in his hand during a magical operation to make a woman submit to him – particularly if he knew that in Greek K is the first letter of the word for the female genitals, *kteis*. (See also CORRESPONDENCES.)

RICHARD CAVENDISH

FURTHER READING: D. and F. Diringer, *A History of the Alphabet throughout the Ages and in all Lands* (Gresham, 1978) and *Writing: Its Origins and Early History* (Praeger, 1962).

From earliest times, mankind has set aside places specially constructed for the purpose of offering sacrifice to supernatural beings – a 'table of the gods'. Altars are to be found in every religion, in every part of the globe

ALTAR

FROM THE DAWN OF human culture there is evidence that man was moved to make. offerings, probably of a sacrificial kind, to supernatural powers. Even the sub-human precursor of mankind, Neanderthal man about 100,000 BC seems to have practised a cult which involved the sacrifice of bears. In caves, for example, at Drachenloch, Switzerland, the Petershöhle near Nuremberg, bear skulls have been found carefully arranged in niches and on stone slabs which the prehistorian J. Maringer has described as 'the oldest altars of sacrifice so far known'. But this interpretation of problematic material of such remote antiquity must necessarily be treated with reserve. More certain is the later evidence from about 6000 BC at Catal Hüyük in Turkey, where a shrine was used for fertility rites, associated with a Mother Goddess and a bull cult. A low mud-brick platform formed a kind of table before a wall adorned with representations of bulls' heads, women's breasts, and human hands. Human skulls were on the 'altar'.

These prehistoric examples indicate that from very early times places have been specially used or constructed for the purpose of offering sacrifice. The need to show that the offerings were specifically presented to supernatural beings doubtless caused the 'altar' to be raised above ground-level, thus suggesting the idea of a 'table of the gods', though this analogy must not be pressed too far. The words for 'altar' in Semitic languages merely indicate a place where a victim was slaughtered, while in some Indo-European languages the terms used denote à place where a sacrifice was burned. Their association with deity gave altars an aura of holiness and the altar could even be regarded as the throne of a deity.

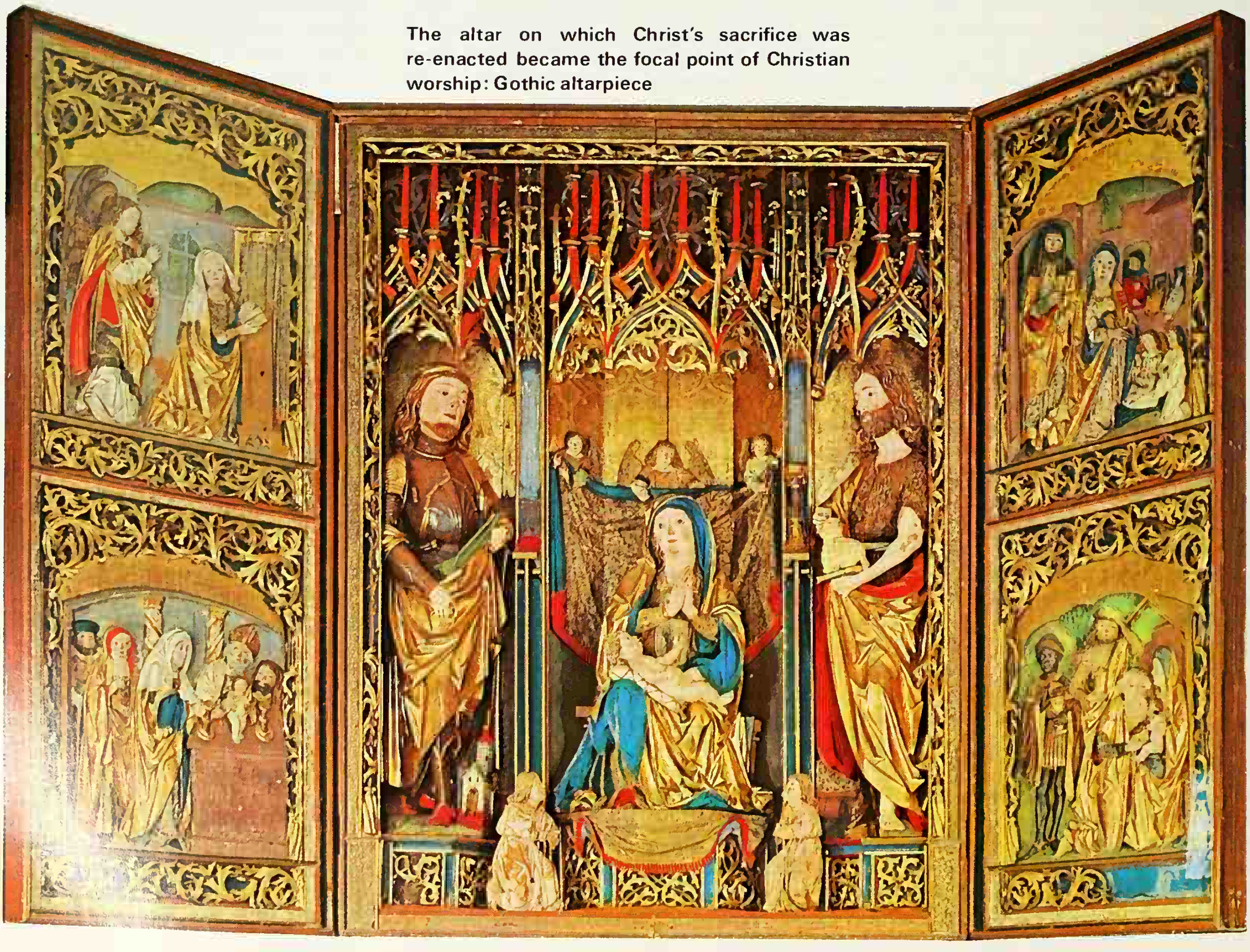
Altars and Sacrifice

Altars are frequently represented in ancient Egyptian art, and the remains of some still survive in temples. It would seem that the Egyptians regarded altars only as necessary adjuncts to ritual worship. Their altars generally appear to have been light tables, holding food and jars. Temple altars could be large stone erections, with steps, such as the sun-altar in the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahiri. Tall stands, containing fire, served for burnt offerings. In ancient Mesopotamia two types of altar generally seem to have been used: large structures of brick for burnt offerings and small altars of various shapes, for burning incense.

Altars figured prominently in ancient Jewish worship. Significant examples of early practice occur in Genesis. In chapter 8 Noah builds an altar and offers burnt offerings, and God 'smelled the pleasing odour'; chapter 22 describes how Abraham built an altar for the sacrifice of his son Isaac. Exodus (chapter 20) records divine instructions for making altars of earth, and of unhewn stone (unhewn because the use of tools on the stone would profane it). Altars of bronze and gold and their equipment made by Solomon for the Temple in Jerusalem, are described in 2 Chronicles (chapter 4). A notable feature of these altars were the 'horns', which projected at the corners they appear on a stone altar found at Megiddo, but their origin and significance are uncertain. Exodus (chapter 21) implies that the altar of God was a place of refuge for criminals; the gospel of Matthew (chapter 23) indicates that in the 1st century AD Jews were accustomed to swear by the altar of the Jerusalem temple.

Altars for public and family worship abounded in the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome. The Greeks distinguished between two kinds of altars. The *bomos* was used for sacrifices to the Olympian gods, the essence of the victim ascending in the smoke of its burning. The *eschara* (hearth) served for the cults of divine heroes and chthonic (underground) deities. This was a low structure, but often the sacrifice was performed over a pit, so that the victim's blood descended into the earth.

In the Greek temple, the image of the deity, not the altar, was the focus of attention. Altars varied in kind and form. On the Athenian Acropolis the great altar of the goddess Athene was an outcrop of



The altar on which Christ's sacrifice was re-enacted became the focal point of Christian worship: Gothic altarpiece

natural rock, and at Delphi Apollo's altar was reported to be made on the bones of sacrificed victims. Public altars were sometimes of immense size: that of Zeus at Pergamon in Asia Minor was 40 feet high. In both Greece and Italy small altars were set up in homes and market-places, at graves, groves and springs. Offerings included fruit, flowers and libations of wine. Shapes varied and the Romans often favoured cylindrical altars. The altars of Hestia in Athens and Vesta in Rome, where a perpetual fire burned, were essentially the 'hearths' of these cities. Roman tombs frequently took the form of altars, dedicated to the cult of the dead.

In ancient Persia the cult of fire, later associated with Zoroastrianism, stemmed from that reverence for fire which characterized Aryan religion and had its Indian counterpart in the worship of Agni, the Vedic god of fire. Persian fire-altars comprised a massive base, surmounted by a stone slab on which stood the fire-container. This fire-cult has been preserved by the Parsees, whose altars follow the ancient pattern.

The Sanskrit word for altar, *vedi*, originally denoted a trench in which the sacrificial fire burned, and was closely associated with the domestic hearth in ancient India. Early Hindu literature describes other vedis of different shapes for various kinds of offerings. Great importance was attached to the shape, and special Sanskrit manuals deal in great detail with the matter. Brick altars were constructed in the form of a falcon, heron or tortoise. A Hindu text, the *Satapatha Brahmana*, compares the shape of an altar with that of a woman. In modern Hinduism altars are simpler affairs: a square-shaped structure of earth or clay, on which a fire is kindled for offerings of butter.

The Altar of Heaven

Altars were essential to the religions of China. There were two kinds: those used n the public worship of the cosmic powers and those required for the ancestor cult. The most impressive of Chinese altars is the Altar of Heaven in Peking, at which the Emperor of China, the Son of Heaven, offered sacrifice, the most crucial occasion being at the winter solstice.

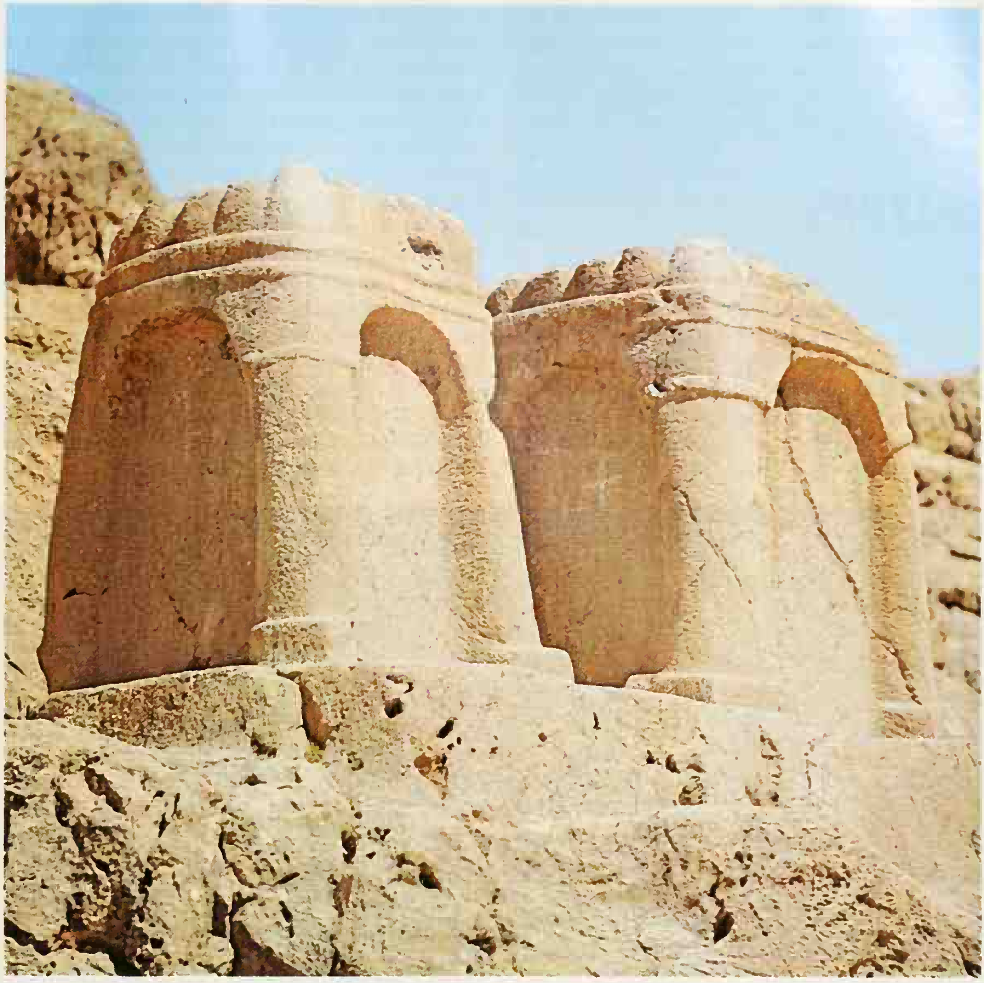
Japan provides a unique example of an altar, or rather of an ideal altar. The Shinto sect of Tenri-kyo reverence a spot n Tamba-Ichi as the centre of the world and the place where creation culminated. There an unfinished altar is located, which will achieve completion when the teaching of the sect has been preached in all lands and universal brotherhood established n the service of God. Apart from this, Japanese altars have only a practical significance as tables of offerings or incense in Shinto and Buddhist shrines.

In Aztec religion the altar was adapted to the slaughter of human victims. The altar in the great temple of Huitzilopochtli, god of war, in Mexico City, was a block of green stone five feet in length and three feet in height and width. Its convex top was so fashioned as to present the breast of the victim to the stone knife of the sacrificing priest, who cut out the heart and presented it to the deity.

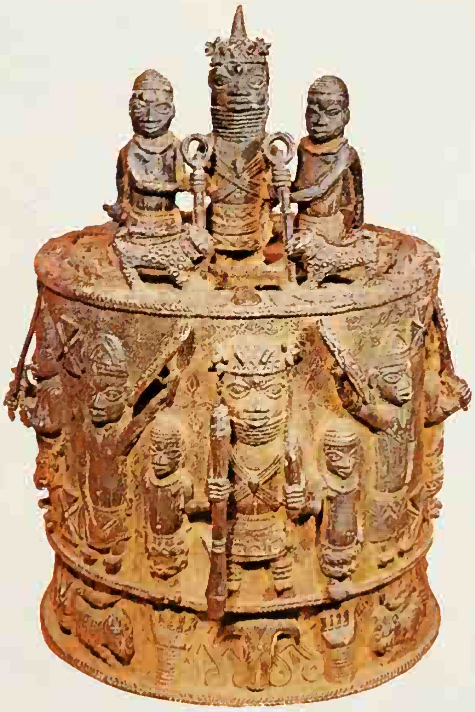
The Christian altar, from earliest times, has been essentially associated with the celebration of the Lord's Supper or Mass. In the early Church the rite was doubtless celebrated on wooden tables but the custom of celebrating it on the tombs of martyrs led to the tradition that stone was the proper material for altars. According to Roman Catholic practice today, even where the structure is mainly of wood, a stone *mensa* ('table') must be inserted. In Catholic Christianity, both in the Eastern and Western Churches, the status of the Mass or Eucharist as the supreme act of public worship has made the altar the focal point of church and cathedral.

The development of the doctrine of the sacrifice of the Mass invested the altar with a sacrificial significance: at each Mass the original sacrifice of Christ is re-presented. The doctrine of transubstantiation (that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ) and the custom of keeping the consecrated sacrament in a receptacle on the altar, encouraged the idea of the altar as a throne or local abode of Christ. Reaction against medieval abuses of the Mass was one of the causes of the Reformation, and it led to the abolition of altars in most Protestant churches. The placing of a cross and candles on altars dates from the 10th century; the location of the high altar is usually at the eastern end, but in some modern churches it is placed in the centre of the church.

S. G. F. BRANDON



Roger Wood London



Michael Holford

Above **Zoroastrian fire altar at Naqshe-Rustam, near the site of Persepolis, Iran**
Below **Nigerian chieftain's bronze 'altar of the hand' symbolizing the power of the hand; it would be placed on a mud altar during religious ceremonies: British Museum**

On the fringes of the Classical world lived a mythical race of warrior women who had declared war on men and relegated them to slavery. The memory of their fierceness and bravery cast a potent spell on the Greek imagination

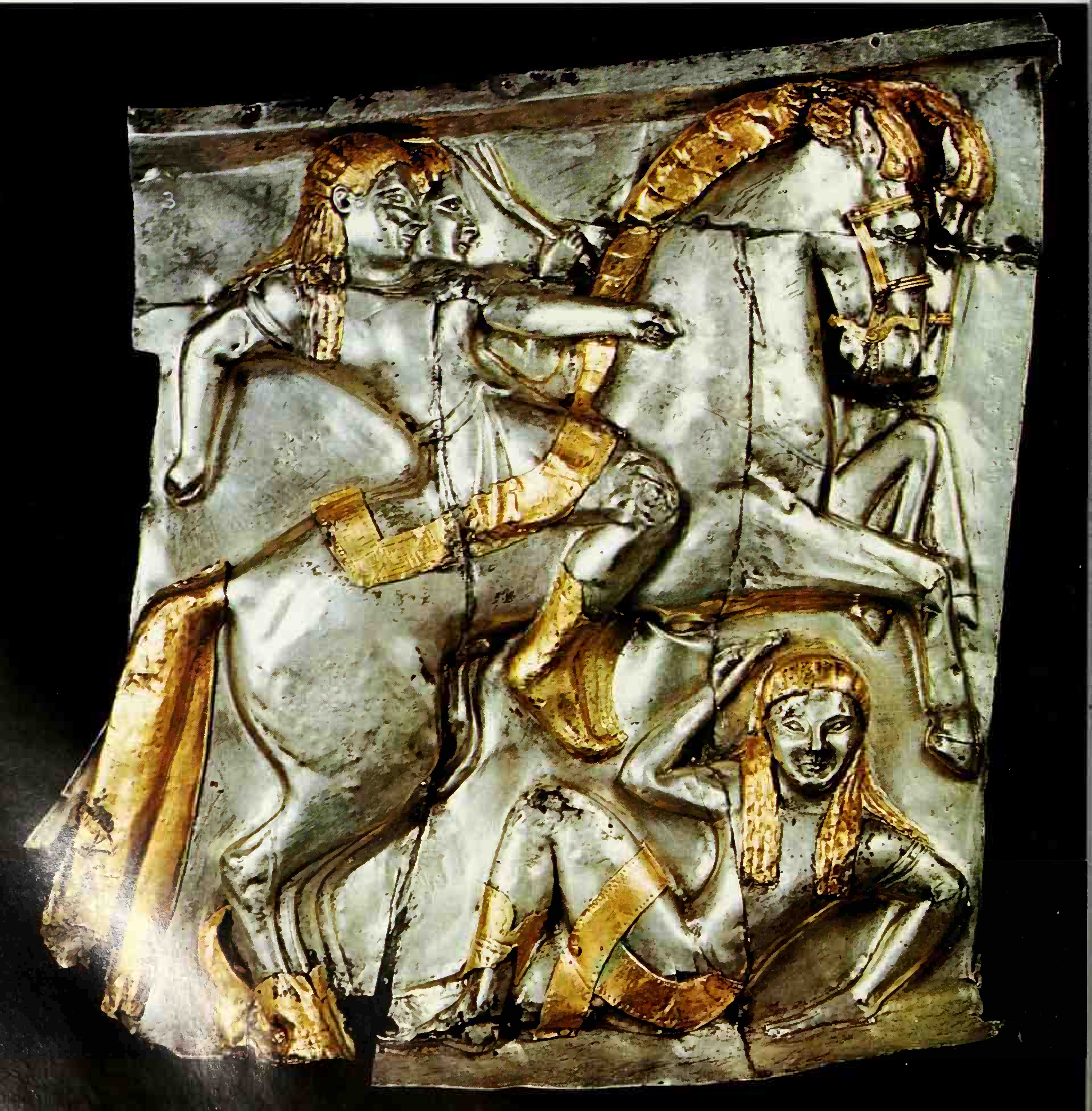
AMAZONS

THE AMAZONS were a mythical race of warrior women, whose battles with a number of Greek heroes were recorded in various local legends. Their original home was in the gorges and forests of the Thermodon valley in Pontus in Asia Minor, and their capital city was Themiscyra on the coast of the Euxine (modern Terme, on the Black Sea coast of Turkey). According to one tradition, men were excluded altogether from their country, but for purposes of propagating the race the Amazons made an annual visit to the Gargareans in the Caucasus. Girls born of these unions were then brought up by the Amazons, each one having her right breast either burnt or cut off to make it easier to hurl a javelin or stretch a bow. Boys were either put to death or sent back to their fathers. Another version has it that a number of men were kept for mating purposes, but had the status of slaves, and were allowed to perform only those tasks executed in other countries by women.

Legend also has it that the legs and arms of these men were mutilated to prevent their challenging the Amazons' power.

Whether men were or were not included in the Amazon state, only women bore arms, not only defending their own country, but making expeditions of conquest into neighbouring territories. They fought both on foot and on horseback, carrying crescent shields and wielding spears, bows and battle-axes. Their life consisted mainly in hunting and war-like exercises and the training of the girl Amazons. They were ruled by a queen, and they worshipped Ares, the god of war, from whom they were believed to be descended, and Artemis, goddess of the hunt.

Stories about the Amazons belong to the



Below **The Amazons were legendary women warriors descended from Ares, the god of war. From a silver panel in the British Museum**

earliest Greek sagas. Homer mentions them in a way which shows that they were familiar to his audience. When in historical times the Greeks got to know the Thermodon region and found no Amazons there, they supposed either that Hercules had destroyed them all, or that they had been driven away. Thus in later legends, the Amazons were moved further and further away from their original homeland, but they were always located on the fringe of the world as it was then known to the Greeks. They were said to be of Scythian origin from Colchis (south of the Caucasus), and there was also supposed to be a race of Amazons in Africa. They were in any case, always foreign to the Greek homeland, and in Greek eyes – like all foreigners – they counted as barbarians.

Hercules, Theseus and the Amazons

Two of their queens, Hippolyta and Penthesilea, figure in widely told Greek myths. The ninth labour imposed on Hercules by his master Eurystheus was to take from Hippolyta her girdle, symbol of her royal power, which had been given to her by the god Ares. According to one version of the myth, Hercules withstood a cavalry charge of Amazons single-handed and routed their whole army, killing Hippolyta at the same time.

Later legends linked the name of Theseus, mythical King of Athens, with Hercules' expedition against the Amazons. Theseus carried off Antiope whose sister Oreithyia, sworn to vengeance, led an invading army into Attica. The Amazons were defeated by the Athenians after four months fighting. Some say that Antiope was killed in the fighting, but others that she survived to make a scene at Theseus' wedding (she being the mother of Theseus' son Hippolytus, though not his lawful wife), where she threatened to murder all the guests. Theseus killed her, to prevent her carrying out her threat.

In another legend, Hippolyta brought yet another Amazon force against Theseus after this wedding, and in the ensuing battle was killed accidentally by her sister Penthesilea. Pursued by the Furies of her dead sister, Penthesilea sought refuge in Troy, where she obtained purification from her blood-guilt at the hands of the aged King Priam. In gratitude she enrolled in the Trojan army, where, as the war-god Ares' daughter, she fought bravely until Achilles killed her. Achilles then wept for the lost beauty, youth and courage of the dead queen and made love to her corpse. Thersites, reputed to be the ugliest Greek at Troy, jeered at Achilles' grief and accused him of unnatural lust, whereupon Achilles killed him. This enraged some of the Greeks and Diomedes, a cousin of Thersites, threw Penthesilea's corpse into the River Scamander.

Amazons in the Old World

We are told, namely, that there was once in the western parts of Libya, on the bounds of the inhabited world, a race which was ruled by women and followed a manner of life unlike that which prevails among us. For it was the custom among them that the women should practise the arts of war and be required to serve in the army for a fixed period, during which time they maintained their virginity; then, when the years of their service in the field had expired, they went in to the men for the procreation of children, but they kept in their hands the administration of the magistracies and of all the affairs of state. The men, however, like our married women, spent their days about the house, carrying out the orders which were given them by their wives; and they took no part in military campaigns or in the exercise of free citizenship in the affairs of the community by virtue of which they might become presumptuous and rise up against the women. When their children were born the babies were turned over to the men, who brought them up on milk and such cooked foods as were appropriate to the age of the infants.

Diodorus Siculus,
Bibliotheca Historica

Amazons in the New World

Sir Walter Raleigh, the famous Elizabethan adventurer, explored South America in the 16th century and was told of Amazons:

But they which are not far from Guiana do meet with men but once in a year. At that time all the Kings of the borders assemble, and the Queens of the Amazons, and after the Queens have chosen, the rest cast lots for their Valentines. This one month they feast, dance and drink of their wines in abundance, and the Moon being done, they all depart to their own Provinces. If they give birth to a son, they return him to the father, if a daughter they nourish it and retain it. It was further told me, that if in the wars they took any prisoners that they used to accompany with those also at what time soever, but in the end for certain they put them to death; for they are said to be very cruel and bloodthirsty, especially to such as offer to invade their territories.

Sir Walter Raleigh,
The Discovery of the Empire of Guiana

The Greeks continued to circulate stories about the Amazons down to a late period. One very popular story was that the Amazon queen Thalestris visited Alexander the Great (356–323 BC) during one of his Asian campaigns, wishing to have a daughter by such a famous general. She stayed with him for 13 days before returning to her own country. Writing more than 400 years later, Plutarch lists no less than 14 authorities who mention this tale, though nine of them, he says, dismissed it as 'complete fiction', and it was laughed at after Alexander's death by his successor in Thrace, Lysimachus.

Slave-Girls or Matriarchs

The Amazons were a favourite subject for Greek sculptors and painters. In art of the earliest periods, they are dressed exactly like Greek warriors, but usually with one breast bare. After the Persian Wars (499–448 BC), for example on Greek vases of the great classical, period, they are represented in oriental garb, wearing caps and trousers, and pictures of them relate more and more to known legends about them. They are never depicted as having lost one breast, in spite of the Greek belief that their name meant 'breastless'.

Various explanations of the origins of the legends about the Amazons have been put forward. Some writers trace them to the armed slave-girls who were dedicated to the service of certain Asian deities, and the association of the Amazons with Artemis supports this theory. But the story is more likely to be an imaginative Greek embroidery of reports about matriarchal tribes in south-west Asia, or of tribes in which the women led a freer and tougher life than they did in Greece. Certainly the persistence of the legend right up to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, and its perennial popularity as a theme in the arts show that it had a deep appeal to some area in ancient Greek fantasy.
(See also HERCULES; THESEUS.)

The Japanese Buddhist deity Amida offers entry into heaven to all his followers, in return for the faithful repetition of a short prayer – 'I adore thee, O Lord of Boundless Light'

AMIDA

THE WORD AMIDA originally denoted merely an abstraction – the ideal of unlimited light. But this abstraction, like others in Buddhism, came slowly to be personalized, first as a mere Bodhissatva (one assiduously undergoing the disciplines necessary to become a Buddha) and then as an actual Buddha.

Amida had 48 wishes, one of which was to let the dead pass into Jodo, or the Pure Land of the afterlife in which he would reign, and another that if any single mortal who had offered prayers to him failed to obtain salvation, then he, Amida, would never be a Buddha. These wishes were fulfilled, with the result that anyone with sufficient faith in Amida was assured of a place in Jodo.

The formulation of this doctrine of Amida as a personage rather than an abstract concept dates back to India in the 2nd century BC, but it was in Japan that it found its most enthusiastic devotees, who eventually formed the Jodo (Pure Land) and other similar sects. Perhaps the first Japanese individual to be granted a vision of Jodo was the student priest Genshin (942–1017), who retreated to Mt Hiei, near the old Japanese capital of Kyoto, in order to live in solitary meditation aloof from the luxury and depravity of his day. His most famous work, *Ojo-yoshu*, is usually quoted as the source of Japanese Amida worship. Certainly it contributed greatly to the foundation of the Jodo sect and had a profound effect on later literature and art.

Genshin maintained that for most people the Nembutsu or repetition of the phrase 'Namu Amida Butsu' ('I adore thee, O Lord of Boundless Light') could, without any other aids, ensure entry into the heaven that awaited the soul after death.

The actual founder of the Jodo sect was not Genshin but Honen (1130–1212). After studying at a monastery on Mt Hiei and finding no satisfaction there, he formulated a doctrine based on a remark of Zendo Daishi, a Buddhist priest of an earlier Epoch, to the effect that man's salvation does not depend so much on his own strength as upon the grace of Amida. Honen thought that men should not trouble themselves about whether their hearts were good or bad, or their sins light or heavy, but should only believe that they would be born into the Pure Land and repeat the invocation 'Namu Amida Butsu' with total conviction.

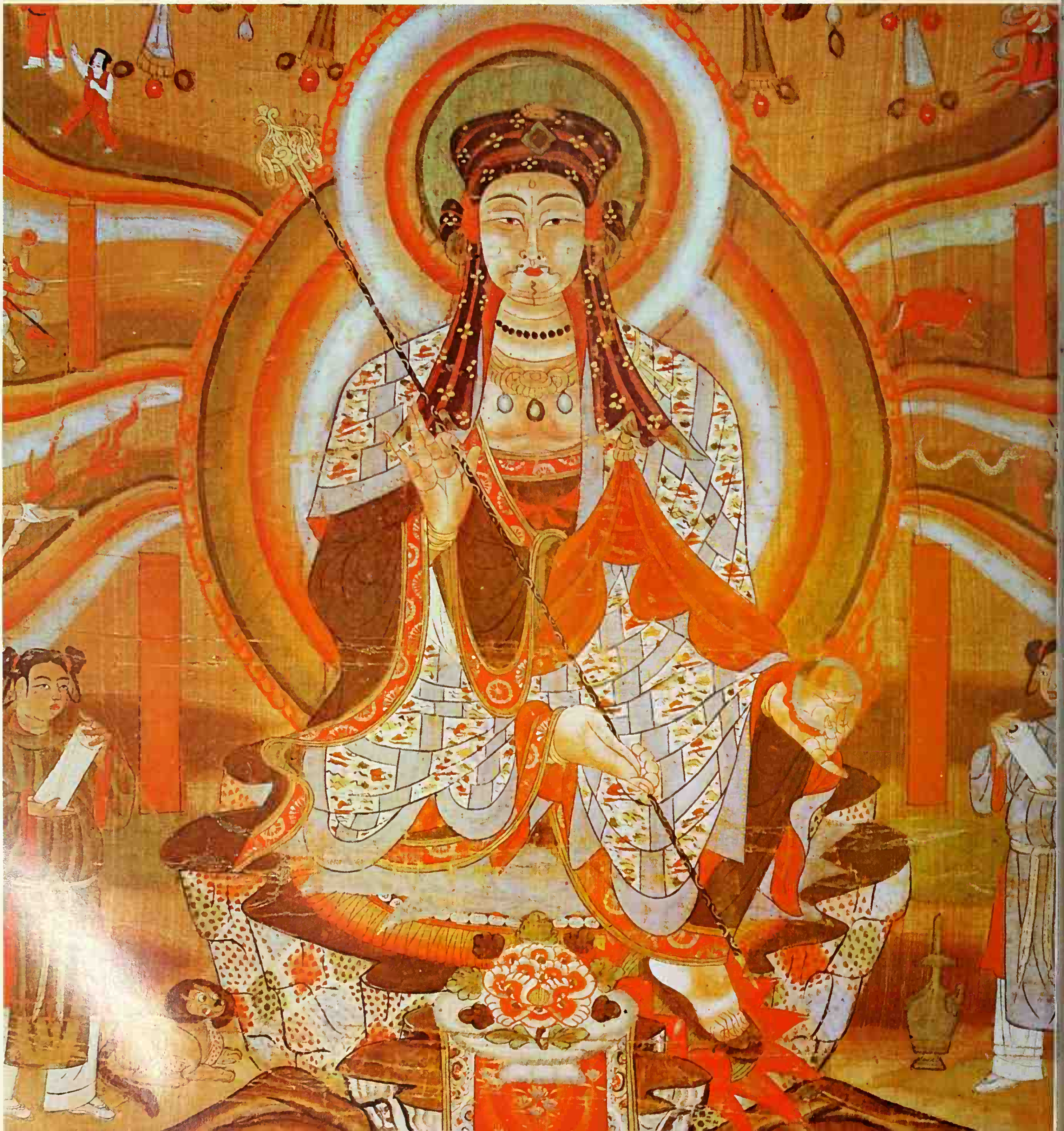
To people of small intellectual capacity and little education, it was natural that a form of Buddhism that required merely a simple act of faith accompanied by a single phrase should have a strong and instantaneous appeal. To people who lived precariously, decimated by wars, famines and plagues, to be able to look forward not to the annihilation of self in the Buddhist Nirvana but to existence in a paradise far from this world of trouble, was a most potent source of consolation. Here, beyond the grave, was Amida offering something unobtainable in mortal life; an existence devoid of pain, sadness, hunger or anxiety.

Amida of the Phoenix Hall

In Buddhist art Amida may generally be recognized by the hands lying in his lap, with the thumbs placed end to end. Very often the halo (in Japanese *goko*) forms a background not only to the head but to th entire body. There is a gleaming spot on th forehead, emblematic of wisdom. The tw images waiting on either side of Amida ar Kannon (goddess of mercy) and Seish (Lord of Might).

Probably the most beautiful sculpture representation of Amida is in the 'Phoeni Hall', part of the Byodoin Temple in th suburbs of Kyoto. Carved in the 11th century, this Amida rests in a building tha indeed resembles the phoenix from which i takes its name, so lightly does it appear t

Amida in the paradise to which those wh believe in him are sure of entry. The gleamin spot on his forehead symbolizes wisdom an his forehead is encircled by a halo



hover over the water that surrounds it. This, the weary, harassed and despairing believers of that time must have thought, was indeed the Lord Amida himself, sitting there in repose, his eyes lowered, as he compassionately promised salvation to all who believed in him. This offer of a future life of bliss is not dissimilar to that offered by depictions of Christ on the Cross; and the self-sacrifice of Amida, renouncing the possibility of becoming a Buddha unless all believers can join him in paradise, is not dissimilar to that of the Christian Saviour.

In most religions there is a conflict between the belief in salvation through works (the idea that it is a man's good actions which bring him to heaven) and the belief in salvation through faith. Those who accept the doctrine of rebirth in a paradise over which Amida presides and who believe that rebirth can be achieved merely by the repetition, in faithful submission, of a single invocation, maintain that all men are possessors of a 'Buddha nature' and that to make an intellectual or spiritual effort at self-improvement is illogical since by doing so one denies that one is already Buddha – and it is only by accepting one's Buddha nature that Buddhahood can be won.

Others, perhaps more self-exacting, deplore the way in which the Jodo and similar sects have turned what was at first no more than an abstraction into an actual personage. But if Buddhism was to be made accessible to the ordinary people of Japan, it was perhaps inevitable that the abstract should be made concrete, the unreal real; so that by seeing the walls of their temples covered with hosts of greater and lesser deities, they should be able to embrace a faith made personal enough to grasp. The promise of a future life may in part explain Japanese willingness to seek out death, even by suicide.

(See also JAPAN.)

FRANCIS KING

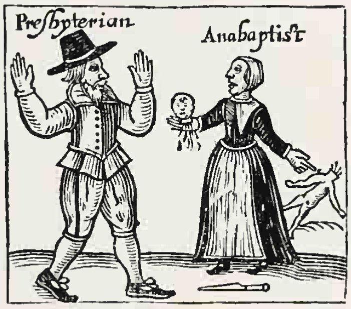
FURTHER READING: D. T. Suzuki, *Japanese Buddhism* (Tokyo, 1938); E. Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (Cassirer, Oxford, 1953) Sir C. Eliot, *Japanese Buddhism* (Arnold, London, 1935); E. Steinilber-Oberlin & K. Matsuo, *The Buddhist Sects of Japan* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1938).

Michael Holford

Amulet

An object worn or carried to ward off evil or to attract good luck; usually a jewel, a stone, or a piece of metal or parchment, inscribed with magic signs.

See TALISMAN.



Mary Evans Picture Library

Anabaptists

Protestant revolutionaries of the 16th century, persecuted for their insistence on re-baptizing converts from other Christian denominations; best known, unfairly, for their 'kingdom of the saints' at Münster in Germany, where they practised polygamy.

See COMMUNISTIC RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS.

Anandamayi Ma is venerated in India for her ability to take on the appearance and personality of gods and goddesses and also for her extraordinary bodily contortions when in trance, sometimes bouncing up and down like a rubber ball

ANANDAMAYI MA

EARLY ONE MORNING in spring 1896, a girl was born in a rural village named Kheora, situated in what is now called East Pakistan. Her parents named her Nirmala Devi. She received no formal education and as a child began to experience peculiar states of intense and brooding abstraction. As she grew older these moods often developed into positive ecstasies of mystical exaltation.

She was married at 13 and sometimes, while preparing meals for her husband, her consciousness would be slowly indrawn to such an extent that she became totally oblivious of her surroundings.

By the time she was 18 it was felt by many who met her that her freshness and simplicity concealed a strange and unpredictable personality which seemed to come and go unaccountably.

It was not long before the power that appeared to use her body as a vehicle through which to show itself was recognized as being not only charming and benignant, but also peculiarly solicitous and motherly in its attitude to those it attracted. Nirmala drew people to her by the sheer magnetism of this radiant and indwelling presence and some people felt they discerned in her an embodiment of divinity.

Among these was a saintly man named Bhaiji, who became one of Nirmala's first devotees. He was the first to call her Anandamayi Ma, or Blissful Mother, the name by which she is now generally known throughout India and in many other countries.

Most of the great mystics of whom we have reliable record are known to have had spiritual guides, some of whom appeared in ordinary human form, and some not. Unlike them, however, Anandamayi Ma – or Mother as she is often called – claimed no direct initiation from a particular guru or spiritual guide.

When asked about this she said, 'In earlier years my parents were my guides; in household life, my husband; and in all the situations of life, now, all persons and things of the world are my guru. But know it for certain; the one Supreme Being is the only Guide for all.'

And, something which is probably unprecedented among Indian holy sages, Anandamayi Ma says she has not undergone any previous births. Which means that she does not claim to be the outcome and final flowering of a series of human incarnations in which she has striven to arrive at spiritual perfection. On the contrary, she has stated on various occasions that she has appeared on earth as the direct result of the profound yearning for God on the part of certain individuals, who – in their ardour to know God and realize their spiritual identity with the Supreme Being – have caused that Supreme One to respond and assume human form.

It is a tenet of oriental belief, particularly in India, that such yearning creates a similar yearning in the Supreme Being; and because of the limitations of his devotees he (the Supreme) shows himself to their external senses in a seemingly human embodiment.

This manifestation of divinity is not confined in Anandamayi Ma to the appearance of a single human embodiment. Whichever god or goddess has been worshipped intensely by any of her devotees, that particular image or aspect of divinity appears to them to play through Mother's form. The spectral semblance of one deity after another has been seen by them to flow out of her being, each image the perfect original of some traditionally recognized god-form. Kali, Krishna, Shiva, Brahma, it matters not which aspect of divinity; its form duly appears when Mother enters one of her moods of mystical ecstasy.

She once said, 'The personality and figures of gods and goddesses are as real as your body or mine.'

A Vision of Kali

Some time in 1925, while in Dacca (about 200 miles north-east of Calcutta) Mother was asked to perform Kali Puja, the worship of the image of Kali.

During preparations for the ceremony, which required an image of the goddess, flowers, incense and sandal paste, Mother saw – about 130 yards distant – the ethereal form of the actual goddess, floating in the air towards her, with hands out-stretched as if eager to come to Mother's lap. Later another apparition appeared to Mother as a little girl of infinite sweetness. This also was Kali, she said.

During the rite itself the celebrants not only noticed the unusual effect which these occult experiences had upon Mother, but they were also swept by a wave of bliss which so engulfed them that they lost consciousness of externals. Each felt divine emotion greater than had been experienced when the ceremony was performed by priests.

In earlier years, during the celebration of kirtan (religious chanting and dancing) Mother would often go into a state of trance during which her body underwent the most amazing contortions. Her devotees claimed that her body, rolling on the ground, would appear to grow unusually large and then, as suddenly, contract almost to nothing. At other times her body behaved as if it were boneless, bouncing up and down like a rubber ball.

These and similar powers are mentioned in certain statements in manuals of yoga, particularly the Shiva Sanhita, where they are listed under the Eight Siddhis, or Magic Powers, that may be developed by yoga practice. But since Mother did not practise yoga, it was claimed that these supra-normal powers manifested themselves in response to the thoughts and emotions of her devotees, being, so to speak, the visible outer tokens of intense inner devotion.

On one occasion a devotee of Anandamayi Ma said to her in all good humour: 'You are credited with great power. If you have such power, just burn me to ashes.' He then set out to return to his own home.

It was an extremely hot day and he had put up his umbrella. Anandamayi Ma suddenly decided to join him and they walked a few paces together.

Richard Lannoy

Above Anandamayi Ma: her devotees believe that the Supreme Being has shown himself to them on earth in her apparently human form *Right* Indian print of Kali, goddess of time, holding symbols of war, raising one hand in peace and grasping for power with the fourth. Anandamayi Ma believed she saw Kali, once floating in the air and once as a little girl of infinite sweetness

The devotee then became conscious of a fierce and unbearable heat beating down on him, despite the umbrella. He panicked and said: 'From where is the fire raining down on my head? Please stop the fire. I have ample proof of your power.' He lowered the umbrella just as the overpowering heat abated. But he noticed that some of the fabric had been consumed, as if by flame.

Anandamayi Ma is famous throughout India for her untiring devotion to the poor and the helpless. She has helped many homeless and starving people.

She teaches that knowledge of God alone constitutes true knowledge; that God alone is real, all else unreal; and that by knowing God one comes to a knowledge of all else besides.

In 1931, the first Ashram or place o worship centering around Mother wa founded. In the following decades, the numbers of her followers increased all over th world, particularly in Western Europe an the U.S.A. In 1982 Mother was in Benga and looking forward to her 87th birthday o May 23rd. One of her most faithful devotees described her recently as 'The most realized living saint of India'. He considers her to be the reincarnation of the goddess Durga, and says that her devotees are numberless, regardless of their religious order.

Since the establishment of that firs Anandamayi Ma Ashram in Dacca, where her devotees could meet together for divine services, more than 20 others have been built by Mother's followers in her name.

KENNETH GRANT

The spider-trickster of West African folklore was carried to the New World by black slaves, and gave rise to the stories of Brer Rabbit, as well as a wealth of Caribbean tales

ANANSE

A FIGURE COMMON to many of the world's religions and mythologies is the trickster. Crafty, mischievous and, above all, thoroughly unscrupulous, his exploits were originally told aloud by skilled story-tellers and enjoyed by the audience for their comedy and because they vicariously celebrated the freedom from the restraints which the requirements of society and the need for decent behaviour impose on us all (see TRICKSTER).

Ananse (or Anansi), the spider, started his career as the trickster in West Africa and was later carried to the New World by black slaves. He was the central character of a huge range of folktales among the different West African peoples. Greedy, sly and selfish, he lives by his wits, double-crossing the other animals – and sometimes human beings as well – to his own advantage, but sometimes falling into his own trap and coming off worst.

He can appear as a spider or as a man, and often saves himself from disaster at the last minute by turning back into a spider. Such was his importance as a folk character that a whole genre of entertaining tales were called 'spider stories' in West Africa, whether Ananse himself appeared in them or not.

Tar Baby Tales

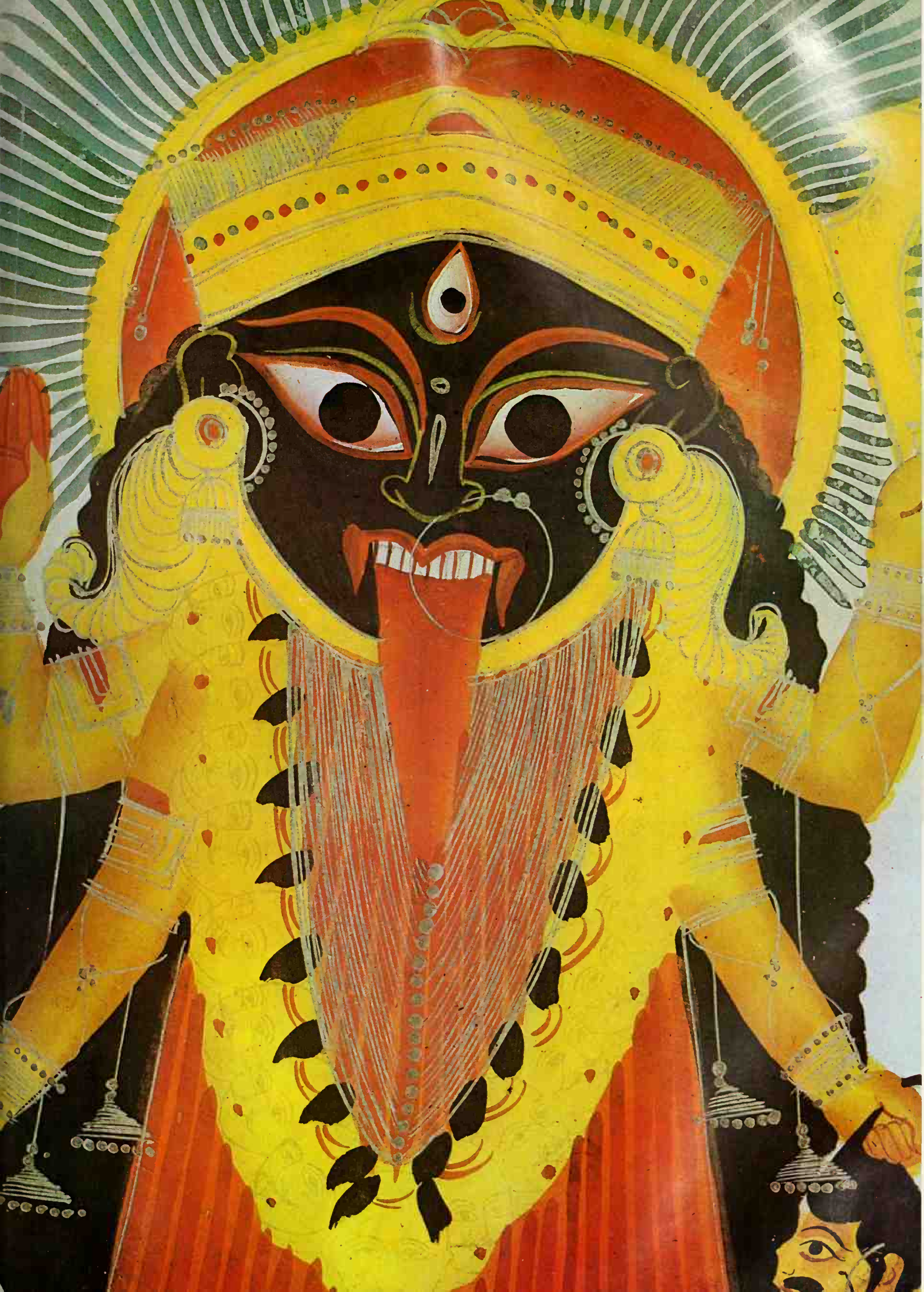
This popular character was naturally carried across the Atlantic by the slaves and established himself with them in the New World. In the Deep South he turned into Miss Nancy or Aunt Nancy and he also influenced the stories of Brer Rabbit, another saucy and infinitely resourceful trickster figure (see AFRO-AMERICAN LORE; BRER RABBIT). The famous tale of Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby, for example, goes back ultimately to the African story of Ananse and the Gum Doll.

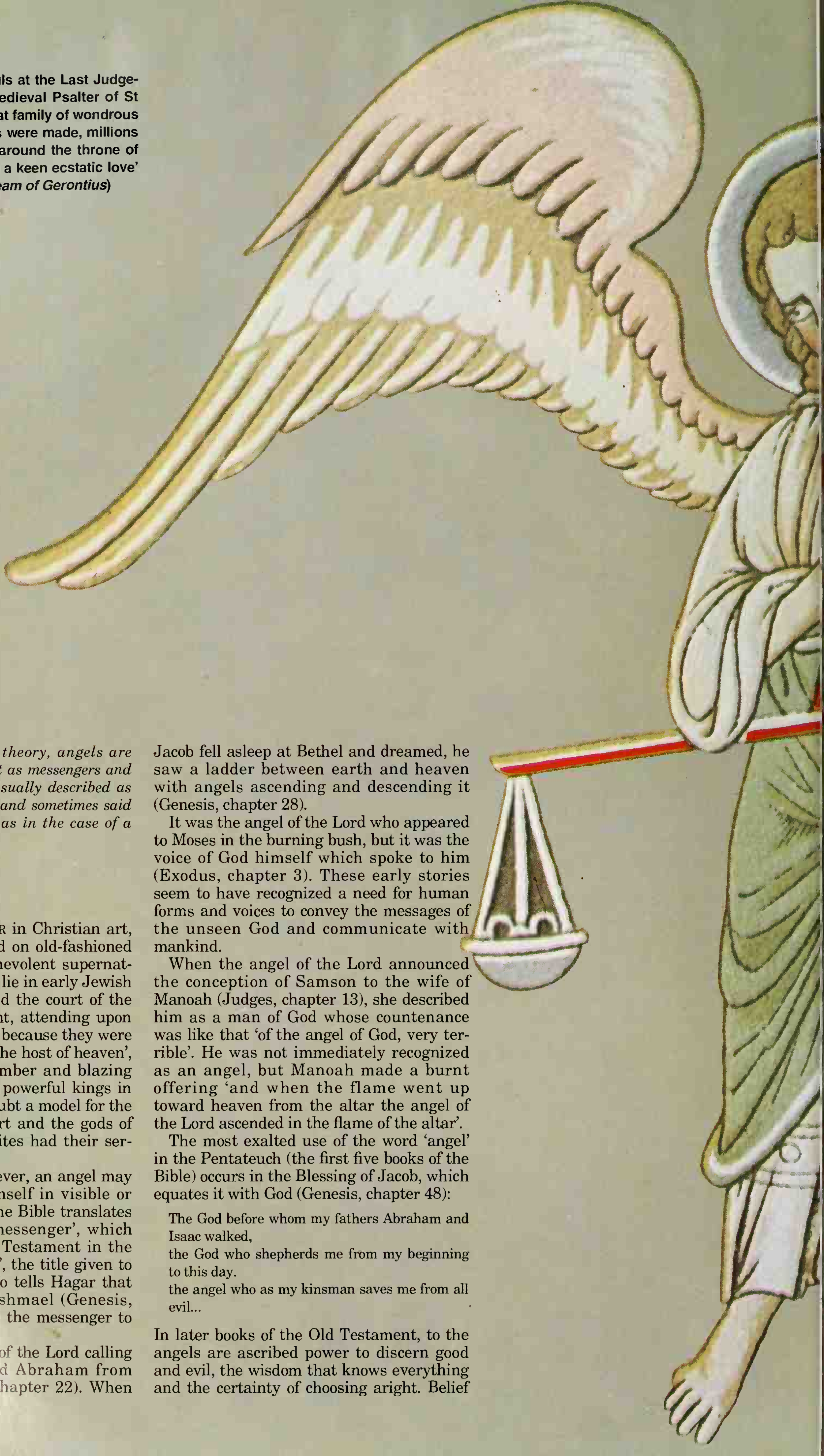
Ananse kept stealing from a man's field, and the man put a gum doll out in the field to catch the culprit. When Ananse saw the gum doll, he tried to engage it in polite conversation, but the gum doll said nothing. Ananse grew so angry that he kicked the doll and of course his foot stuck to it. Then he kicked it with the other foot and slapped it with both hands, all of which were stuck fast. So Ananse was helpless when the man came out, found him and beat him until his body was completely flat.

In another African story, Ananse tells the king that he rides Tiger. When Tiger hears this he is furious and goes to fetch Ananse to make him admit to the king that he has lied. Ananse cannot go, he is ill, he can't walk, he can barely even stand up. Tiger insists that Ananse must come to the king at once, even if Tiger has to carry him. Ananse says, very well, but he will need a saddle or he will fall off Tiger's back, and he needs a bridle to hold on to and a whip to brush the flies away. The impatient Tiger agrees to all this and the pair duly arrive at the king's house, with Tiger at full gallop and Ananse in the saddle, wielding the whip and calling to the king to look and see him riding Tiger just as he had claimed that he did. In the American South, Brer Rabbit rides Brer Fox or Brer Wolf in much the same way.

The same story survived in the West Indies, where Tiger wants to marry the beautiful Miss Selina, who is adored by all the animals. He goes courting her of an evening, dressed up in his best suit. Ananse has an eye on Miss Selina himself and she seems to favour them equally, so the crafty Ananse tells her that Tiger was formerly his old father's riding horse. Miss Selina, who is proud as well as beautiful, thinks the less of Tiger for this and the rest of the story follows its accustomed course. At the end Tiger is so ashamed when Miss Selina sees him being ridden by Ananse that he hides away in the forest and the proud Miss Selina marries Mr Peacock.

Enjoyably humorous tales of Ananse and the other animals – Tiger and Crow, the cat and the mouse – still go the rounds of an evening in the Caribbean. The animals all behave like human beings and the animal and human worlds are mixed up together, while the crafty Spider spins his webs of cunning deceit.





The angel who weighs souls at the Last Judgement, a detail from the medieval Psalter of St Louis. 'It is a member of that family of wondrous beings who, ere the worlds were made, millions of ages back, have stood around the throne of God... and served him with a keen ecstatic love' (Cardinal Newman, *The Dream of Gerontius*)

In Jewish and Christian theory, angels are God's courtiers and are sent as messengers and helpers to men. They are usually described as beautiful, winged creatures and sometimes said to be of enormous height; as in the case of a female angel 96 miles high

ANGELS

THE ANGELS LONG FAMILIAR in Christian art, in carols and hymns, and on old-fashioned Christmas cards, are benevolent supernatural beings whose origins lie in early Jewish speculations. They formed the court of the God of the Old Testament, attending upon his heavenly throne, and, because they were linked with the stars as 'the host of heaven', they were myriad in number and blazing with light. The courts of powerful kings in the Near East were no doubt a model for the idea of the heavenly court and the gods of the Hittites and Canaanites had their servants and envoys.

In the early texts, however, an angel may be an aspect of God himself in visible or audible form. 'Angel' in the Bible translates the Hebrew word for 'messenger', which first appears in the Old Testament in the phrase 'angel of the Lord', the title given to the divine messenger who tells Hagar that she will give birth to Ishmael (Genesis, chapter 16). Hagar takes the messenger to be the Lord himself.

The voice of the angel of the Lord calling from heaven restrained Abraham from killing Isaac (Genesis, chapter 22). When Jacob fell asleep at Bethel and dreamed, he saw a ladder between earth and heaven with angels ascending and descending it (Genesis, chapter 28).

It was the angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, but it was the voice of God himself which spoke to him (Exodus, chapter 3). These early stories seem to have recognized a need for human forms and voices to convey the messages of the unseen God and communicate with mankind.

When the angel of the Lord announced the conception of Samson to the wife of Manoah (Judges, chapter 13), she described him as a man of God whose countenance was like that 'of the angel of God, very terrible'. He was not immediately recognized as an angel, but Manoah made a burnt offering 'and when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar'.

The most exalted use of the word 'angel' in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) occurs in the Blessing of Jacob, which equates it with God (Genesis, chapter 48):

> The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
> the God who shepherds me from my beginning to this day,
> the angel who as my kinsman saves me from all evil...

In later books of the Old Testament, to the angels are ascribed power to discern good and evil, the wisdom that knows everything and the certainty of choosing aright. Belief

in their goodness is implied in the comment in Job (chapter 4) that God charges 'even his angels' with error. They can also take the blame for God's more dubious actions, as in the passage in which God needs a spirit to trap the wicked King Ahab and lure him to his death (1 Kings, chapter 22). One of the heavenly host volunteers to be 'a lying spirit' and lead Ahab astray, and this scene, with an angel carrying out a morally reprehensible action for God, is a step on the way to the myth of the Devil, the great archangel who turned to evil and rebelled against God (see DEVIL).

Cherubim and Seraphim

In the Old Testament the functions of angels are to worship God and attend on him, ready to do his bidding. They announce future prosperity or destruction, guard holy places, guide and protect people. When Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden, God set one of the cherubim, an angel with a flaming sword, to guard it, and figures of cherubim with outspread wings guarded the ark of the covenant (Genesis, chapter 3, Exodus, chapter 25). There were also the seraphim, seen famously in a vision by Isaiah, standing above the heavenly throne, each with six wings, and crying out, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts' (Isaiah, chapter 6).

At first the angels have no names and no personality separate from the God whose messages they bear. As time went by, however, greater individuality crept in. The book of Daniel (chapters 8 to 10, 12) introduces a great heavenly figure, a 'prince' or archangel, with a personal name — Michael (the name means 'like God') – who has charge of God's people. There is another individual figure, too, a flying man-like being named Gabriel ('man of God'), who comes to explain the meaning of a vision to Daniel. He is the basis for later portrayals of angels in art as human figures with wings. The books of the Apocrypha introduce two more: Raphael ('God has healed') in Tobit and Uriel ('God is my light') in 2 Esdras.

The Glory of the Lord

In the New Testament, just as in the Old, God may choose to communicate with mankind through an angel. At the beginning of the first gospel there appears in Joseph's dream 'an angel of the Lord' telling him of the conception of Jesus (Matthew, chapter 1). In a scene dear to generations of Christians and often pictured in Christian art, the birth of Jesus is annnounced to the shepherds at Bethlehem, who are keeping watch over their flocks by night. 'And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were filled with fear'. Gabriel, who 'stands in the presence of God', reappears as the angel who goes to Nazareth to tell Mary that she is to be the mother of Jesus, another scene which inspired Christian artists (Luke, chapters 1, 2).

The benevolent interest which angels take in mankind is expressed in Jesus's saying that 'there is joy before the angels of

God over one sinner who repents' (Luke, chapter 15). Jesus also says that children have guardian angels, who 'always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven' (Matthew, chapter 18).

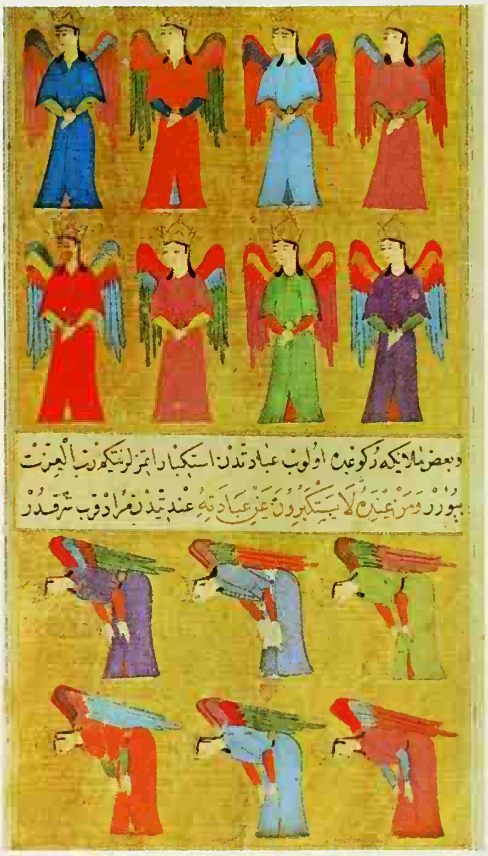
The gnostic sects of the early centuries after Christ (see GNOSTICISM) gave angels a commanding role in the running of the universe, which was believed to be organized in seven spheres, each controlled by an angel. Human spiritual progress depended on rising through the seven spheres to the heavens, which could be achieved only by knowing the names of the controlling angels and the passwords which would carry the soul safely upwards. These names and invocations passed on into the European tradition of ritual magic. Some early Christian groups, influenced by gnostic ideas, worshipped angels and even regarded them as more important figures than Christ. They were denounced by St Paul (Colossians, chapter 2, Hebrews, chapter 1).

On the Head of a Pin

In orthodox Christian belief, as it developed in the early Church, each person had his or her guardian angel, and babies who were aborted or exposed were cared for by angels. The prayers of the faithful were carried up to God by angels, who also tended the souls of the dying. It was the Archangel Michael who led the good angels in the war in heaven, when the Devil rebelled with his legions. It was Michael who defeated the Devil and thrust him down from heaven, and at the end of time when the last trump sounded, Michael would weigh the souls of the dead in his scales to determine their fate (see JUDGEMENT OF THE DEAD).

Speculation increased, to seven or eight, the three heavens known to St Paul. The heavens were thought to be above the firmament where the fallen angels were immured and were all inhabited exclusively by angels, the lower heavens by those concerned with human affairs, the upper heavens by the Angels of the Presence. Corresponding to the seven heavens (and linked with the sun, moon and planets) were seven archangels, each with numerous subordinates. Angels were now said to have been God's first creation, formed from fire. They were sometimes described as of astonishing height, symbolizing their greatness. In the Gospel of Peter the heads of the two angels who bore Christ's body to heaven actually touched the sky and the unorthodox Christian sect of Elkesaites knew of two angels, one of them female, which were 96 miles high.

In the 5th century AD Dionysius the Areopagite, now generally known as Pseudo-Dionysius, put the Christian angels in order. To the seven orders linked with the seven heavens he added the Seraphim and Cherubim from the Old Testament to make a total of nine orders, a satisfactory total as the number of the Trinity three times repeated. He arranged them in three choirs or hierarchies. The highest were the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones, who spent their time in contemplation of the Almighty. Next came the Dominions, Virtues and Powers, who ran God's universe. Third were the Principalities, Archangels and Angels, who busied themselves in carrying out the orders of their superiors. St Augustine believed that angels had material bodies, but Pseudo-Dionysius said they were purely spiritual in nature, and this was approved by St Thomas Aquinas.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Moslems pray only to God, but also ask angels to intercede for them: 'Mohammedan dwellers in the presence of God', from a Turkish manuscript in the British Museum

Wing Measurements

Crawford H. Greenewalt in his book Hummingbirds *considers how large an angel's wings would need to be for a weight of about 11 stone:*

The wing from wrist to tip would be about four feet long, its total length between six and seven feet. When folded neatly into the body, the end of the wing would come just below the knee – comfortable enough for perching and walking. The wings would beat about once every second – a nice easy rhythm – not too far from a normal walking pace. The wings would, however, be heavy, perhaps a quarter the weight of the body and, alas, here lies the rub: the human frame hasn't the pectoral muscles to drive such formidable gear. Human pectorals are barely five per cent of the total body weight and a reasonable aerial job would call for at least fifteen per cent.

Speculation about angels continued in the Middle Ages. There were believed to be dizzyingly enormous numbers of them – 3,472,000 according to one diligent calculation – and, as is well known, there was learned argument as to how many of them could dance on the head of a pin. In modern theological thought angels still present concepts of 'pure spirits without physical bodies' or 'mirrors of God's mind and will'. Belief in them remains in varying degrees an article of faith, but their origins and nature, and interpretation of human experiences of their help, are matters of much debate. Throughout the centuries there have been accounts of angelic visitations, to many Celtic saints, for instance, and to the young Joan of Arc.

Islamic Angels

Moslem angelology has followed the Jewish and Christian pattern. In the seventh heaven Allah sits on his throne surrounded by the angels of his court. According to Islamic tradition, the Koran was revealed to Mohammed by angels and, when the Prophet was assailed by doubts, it was the Archangel Jibril (Gabriel) who appeared to him to confirm the divine source of the revelations. It was Jibril, too, who instructed Noah to build the Ark and who later drowned the army of Pharaoh in the Red Sea, and Jibril who took Mohammed up through the seven heavens to the presence of Allah. Izrail in Islamic tradition is the Angel of Death, who separates the soul from the body, and Israfil is the angel who will sound the Last Trump when the world ends.

Angels in Christian Art

Christian theologians' emphasis on the pure spirituality of angels inspired the standard portrayal of them in Christian art as winged, beautiful and youthful figures of indeterminate sex. They could be depicted without bodies at all, as winged heads. The seraphim were often red in colour and were shown holding lighted candles, but the Old Testament's formidable cherubim were eventually reduced to 'cherubs' – fat and bouncy infants modelled on Cupid.

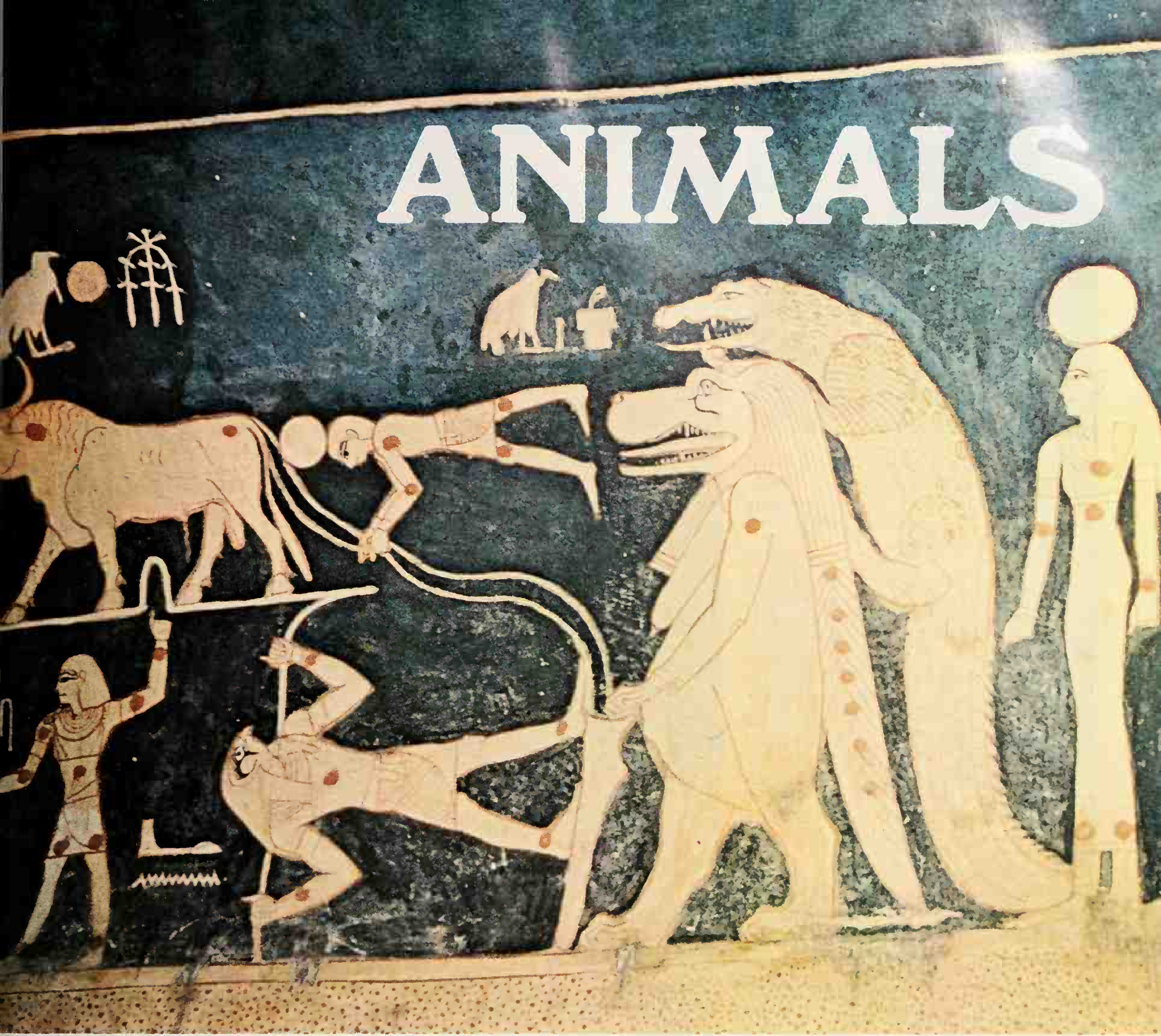
The Archangel Michael is often in shining silver armour as the captain of the heavenly host. He may be wearing a jewelled crown and sometimes carries his scales. The Archangel Gabriel appears most frequently in depictions of the Annunciation, carrying a lily as the symbol of the purity of the Virgin Mary. Raphael often appears as a traveller or pilgrim, with sandals on his feet and a staff in his hand. Shakespeare was fully consistent with the Bible in making Hamlet, confronted with his father's ghost cry out: 'Angels and ministers of grace defend us!' and again, when Hamlet is killed, in giving Horatio the line, 'Flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!'

A particularly charming notion is the idea of the angels playing musical instruments to create the delectable harmony of heaven and they can be seen on high in many churches. As long as the Bible is known and loved, the word 'angel' will be used for a figure coming unsummoned and bringing from God revelation affecting the life of the one to whom he comes. (See also GUARDIAN SPIRITS.)

J.N.SCHOFIELD

FURTHER READING: G. Davidson, *Dictionary of Angels* (Collier Macmillan, 1968).

ANIMALS



The hippo-crocodile goddess Taurt in a sacred procession, shown on the walls of the burying place of the Apis bulls at Sakkara in Egypt. Animals were extremely important in Egyptian religion and most of the Egyptian gods were shown in animal forms

Teeth and claws of the Gods

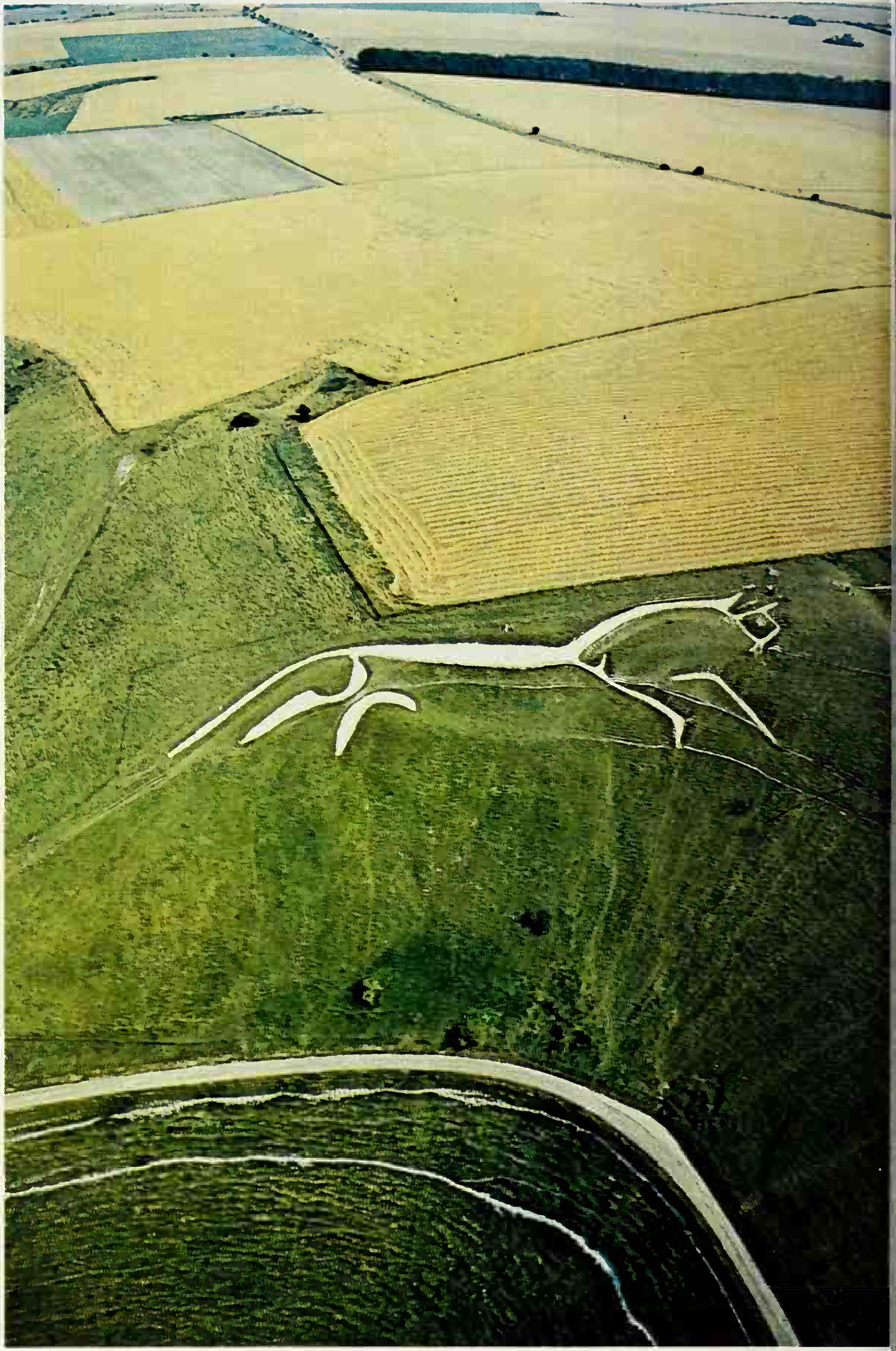
'arly men recognized a close link between nemselves and the beasts which they feared, sed or admired. They designed magical rituals) obtain the animals' powers and many nimals were elevated to the realms of the gods

FRICA IS STILL sometimes troubled by outreaks of the leopard men, who disguise hemselves as leopards with masks and netal claws, pounce on a victim who they ill by piercing the jugular with their claws, nd part of whose body they eat. In India acred cows wander the streets unmolested. ong ago an Egyptian mob murdered a oman for killing a cat. The early Christians vere accused of worshipping a donkey. Norse erserkers in the skins of bears or wolves vere feared for their crazed ferocity in battle. Finn mac Cumaill, a great Irish hero of legend, could turn himself into a deer or a dog at will. His two faithful hounds were the sons of his sister, who had been magically transformed into a bitch. The Minotaur of ancient fable was a man with a bull's head who lurked in the Cretan labyrinth, offspring of Queen Pasiphae and a bull that came from the sea.

In folklore there are talking animals and animals which marry human husbands or wives. Some animals are said to sense the presence of ghosts. It is lucky to see a white horse. A black cat can be either a good luck charm or an omen of evil. The Devil frequently appeared in animal form to witches, who were also accused of suckling familiar spirits in animal shape. In South America sorcerers have jaguar familiars and African witches are believed to ride on hyenas at night.

Behind all this is an outlook which does not clearly differentiate between men, animals, spirits and gods. Primitive man does not draw our accustomed distinction between human beings and animals at all. They share the world with him, on his own level, and he admires them, fears them, respects them, in a way which is foreign to us in

Gerald Cubitt



Above **Stone horse guarding imperial tombs at Nanking, China** ***Right*** **The prehistoric White Horse of Uffington, cut into the Berkshire downs, possibly a representation of the Celtic goddess Epona, 'divine horse'**

cities or in our long-domesticated countryside. They are creatures of the same kind as himself, though differently shaped and in some ways better equipped. So they can turn into men, and vice versa. If a man wants to acquire the speed of the deer, the strength of the bear, the cunning of the fox, the night sight of the cat, he imitates the animal. He dresses up in its skin, mimics its cries, dances out its movements. He ruts as a stag, as a leopard he sinks his fangs into flesh. By concentratedly imagining himself as an animal, he can induce a state of mind in which he feels he has become it.

The line between man and animal is easily crossed, man being an animal himself. So is the line between animals and the spirit world, because in primitive thought everything that exists has a spirit as well as a body (see ANIMISM). Men have souls which survive death: so do animals, and like the ghosts of men their spirits may be good or evil. The gods, like the animals, have powers which surpass those of men. A god may be seen in an animal which shares some quality with him. And the magical mimicry by which a man turns himself into a beast may also be the magic by which he transforms himself into a god.

Man-Wallaby

Totemism is a type of social organization in which groups of people associate themselves closely with an animal (or a plant or an object – see TOTEM) as wolf-men, bear-men or whatever it may be. They use the totem as a badge of identification, much as a feudal knight was identifiable by the emblems on his armour, and the system may have originated from resemblances between a man and a particular animal. But it was evidently not merely a matter of saying of someone 'he looks or behaves like a bear' but of implying, 'he *is* a bear'. In Australia, 'even today, when an aborigine says he is, for example, a wallaby, he means what he says. He and the wallaby species are "one flesh". . .' (see AUSTRALIA). Except in special circumstances he does not kill or eat a wallaby, and he and his group are responsible for carrying out the rituals which ensure a plentiful supply of wallabies for everyone else. This is because he and the wallabies are descended from the same ancestor, a hero of long ago who was both a man and a wallaby.

Sacred Cat and Crocodile

Whether totemism lies behind the animal cults of Egypt is disputed, as there is no certain evidence of any totemic stage in Egyptian history, but the importance of animals in Egyptian religion astonished Greek, Roman and early Christian authors and embarrasses Egyptologists. Most, though not all, of the Egyptian gods were portrayed as animals, or as human beings with animals' heads, or in other mixe human and animal shapes. The sky go dess Hathor could be shown as a cow or a woman's face with the horns and ears a cow. The goddess Taurt, 'the great one had the head of a hippo, the back and tail a crocodile, a woman's breasts and t claws of a lioness.

Some animals were sacred in particul localities: the people of Bubastis in t Nile delta, home of the cat goddess Bas would never kill a cat; in the Faiyu where Sebek the crocodile god was wo shipped, there was a pool of sacred croc diles. Huge cemeteries have been di covered containing the mummified bodi of dogs, cats, crocodiles, falcons and bull Recent excavations at Sakkara have four

The mimicry by which a man turns himself into a beast may also be the magic by which he transforms himself into a god

races of a cemetery of mummified baboons, ho were given names and apparently enerated as gods.

All cats were divine in Bubastis but in ther instances only one animal of a species mbodied a god. At Memphis the Apis bull ved in splendour as 'the herald of Ptah', a od who was not himself represented as a ull but always in human form. When the ull died, a calf with the special markings hich identified it as the successor had to e found. For 40 days the calf was attended y women, who at intervals displayed their exual organs to him. Then he was brought y boat to Memphis, his cabin lined with old.

The prominence of animals in Egyptian eligion was not merely a tolerated survival rom more primitive times. Their cults roused genuine devotion and were costly f time, trouble and money. In the late 4th entury BC the funeral of one Apis bull as so expensive that the funds set aside or it were used up and it was necessary to orrow an extra amount equivalent to 25,000 in modern money. Henri Frankfort as commented that 'there is something ltogether peculiar about the meaning hich animals possessed for the Egyptians. lsewhere, in Africa or North America, for xample, it seems that either the terror of nimal strength or the strong bond, the nutual dependence of man and beast (in he case of cattle cults, for instance), xplains animal worship. But in Egypt *the nimal as such*, irrespective of its specific ature, seems to possess religious signi- cance; and the significance was so great hat even the mature speculation of later mes rarely dispensed with animal forms in lastic or literary images referring to the ods.'

Animal and God

One theory of animal gods is that the god s first worshipped as an animal and later cquires human characteristics. His human ature grows gradually more important ntil he becomes fully human, though the nimal often retains a connection with him nd is sacred to him. But in many cases no uch evolutionary pattern can be demons- rated; for Egyptian deities, for instance, or or Celtic gods. For example, the Celtic god ernunnos, 'the horned one', who was losely connected with the stag and also with a peculiar ram-horned serpent, appears as part stag or serpent and part human in both the earliest and the latest representations of him.

The Front Rank of Nature

To primitive man nature is his living larder, to which – especially at the lowest stages of culture – he has to repair directly in order to gather, cook, and eat when hungry. The road from the wilderness to the savage's belly and consequently to his mind is very short, and for him the world is an indiscriminate background against which there stand out the useful, primarily the edible, species of animals or plants . . . A sentiment of social nature is built round each species, a sentiment which naturally finds its expression in folklore, belief and ritual.

. . . the same type of impulse which makes small children delight in birds, take a keen interest in animals, and shrink from reptiles, places animals in the front rank of nature for primitive man. By their general affinity with man – they move, utter sounds, manifest emotions, have bodies and faces like him – and by their superior powers – the birds fly in the open, the fishes swim under water, reptiles renew their skins and their life and can disappear in the earth – by all this the animal, the intermediate link between man and nature, often his superior in strength, agility and cunning, usually his indispensable quarry, assumes an exceptional place in the savage's view of the world.

Bronislaw Malinowski
Magic, Science and Religion

Again, although the symbolism of an animal and its connection with a particular god naturally tend to be based on its own most striking characteristics, the symbolism and the origin of the connection are not always clear. Wolves, as fierce predators, are associated with war gods, like the Roman Mars or the Teutonic Tyr, but also with the Greek god Apollo, who was not a war god. The inquisitive and chattering baboon seems well suited to Thoth, the Egyptian god of intelligent inquiry who invented speech. But whether this is the correct explanation and whether, if it is, the ape was connected with the god because it embodied part of his nature or, the other way round, its connection with him for some other reason influenced later ideas of his nature, is uncertain.

Immortal Snake

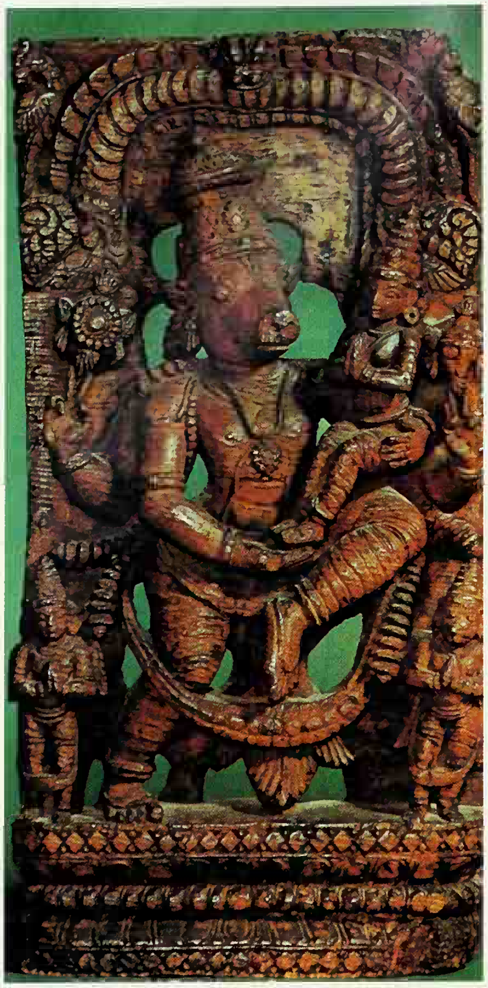
One beast which has taken a firm grip on the human imagination is the serpent. It was thought to have found the secret of avoiding death, because it sloughs its old skin and appears rejuvenated in a new one, and so in myths like the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh it steals the immortality which the gods had meant for man. This may have been its original role in the story of Adam and Eve (see FIRST MAN). The Eden story later gave the serpent its connection with the Devil, a connection assisted by the snake's phallic shape which linked it with lust, and also with fertility.

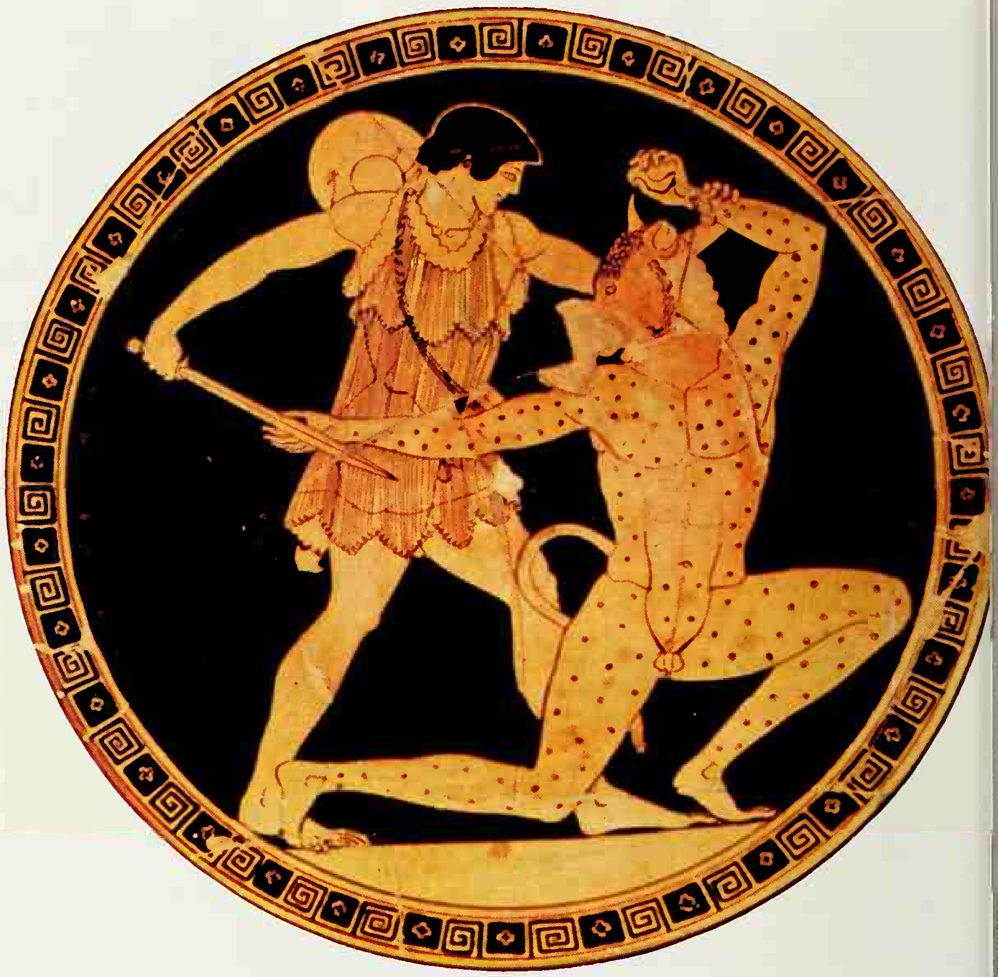
Some snakes were seen to live in holes in the ground or to appear from crannies in rocks, which connected them with the earth, with fertility again, and with the underworld and the dead. In Mesopotamia the Sumerian and Babylonian goddesses of the underworld were identified as serpents. In Greece sacred snakes were one of the marks of an underground god or spirit; honey-cakes were offered to them. The Fijian god Ndengei is a giant snake who lives in a cave and when he moves the earth quakes.

The cult of the house snake, offered milk and breadcrumbs, and addressed as 'master of the house', is not entirely dead in Greece even yet. There are many shrines of snake gods in India and python gods were common in Africa until this century. The plumed serpent appears in ancient Mexican religions and snakes, especially rattlesnakes, in the myths and rituals of North American Indians.

Bull and Boar

The bull is another important beast in the history of religions, impressive for its strength, its pawing hoof and fierce charge, and its formidable sexual powers. Enlil, the great Babylonian god of fertility and storm, was addressed as 'overpowering ox, exalted overpowering ox'. Gods of thunder, storm and rain, which fertilizes the earth, were often pictured as bulls. In India the Aryan sky god Dyaus, the red bull who smiles through the clouds, 'bellows downwards', which evidently means 'thunders', and later several Hindu gods have bull forms. Mithras, the Persian god of light whose cult





Michael Holford

rivalled Christianity in the early centuries AD, was connected with the bull. In Crete the spectacular and lethal sport of bull-leaping was a religious ritual. The first Minos, or bull king of Crete, had been begotten by Zeus in the form of a bull, and the bull was also connected with the noise and destruction of earthquakes. The horns of the bull, as of other horned animals like the stag, were widely regarded as peculiarly sacred and powerful (see HORNS).

Celtic mythology abounds with sacred boars, magic pigs which reappear whole after being killed and eaten, and fearsome supernatural boars which are hunted by heroes. In Welsh legend, King Arthur and his men hunted Twrch Trwyth, a king who had been turned into a boar, for the treasures, a comb and shears, which he carried between his ears. Pork was the meat on which chieftains feasted in northern Europe, as did warriors after death in Valhalla, and the Celts buried pigs' bones and joints of pork with the dead. But elsewhere, as among Jews and Mohammedans, pig's flesh has been considered 'unclean' and forbidden.

Sun Chariot

The horse-taming nomads of southern Russia, who spread into northern Europe, Greece, the Middle East and India in successive waves over a period of hundreds of years after c 2000 BC, connected their swift and powerful stallions with the sun, and imagined the sun crossing the sky in a horse-drawn chariot. The Celtic war god was closely associated with horses, perhaps because of the use of horse chariots in battle, and in France and Britain the Celtic goddess Epona, 'divine horse', was popular with the cavalrymen of Roman armies. Freyr, the fertility god of the Vikings, was linked with both the boar and the horse.

The Animal in Man

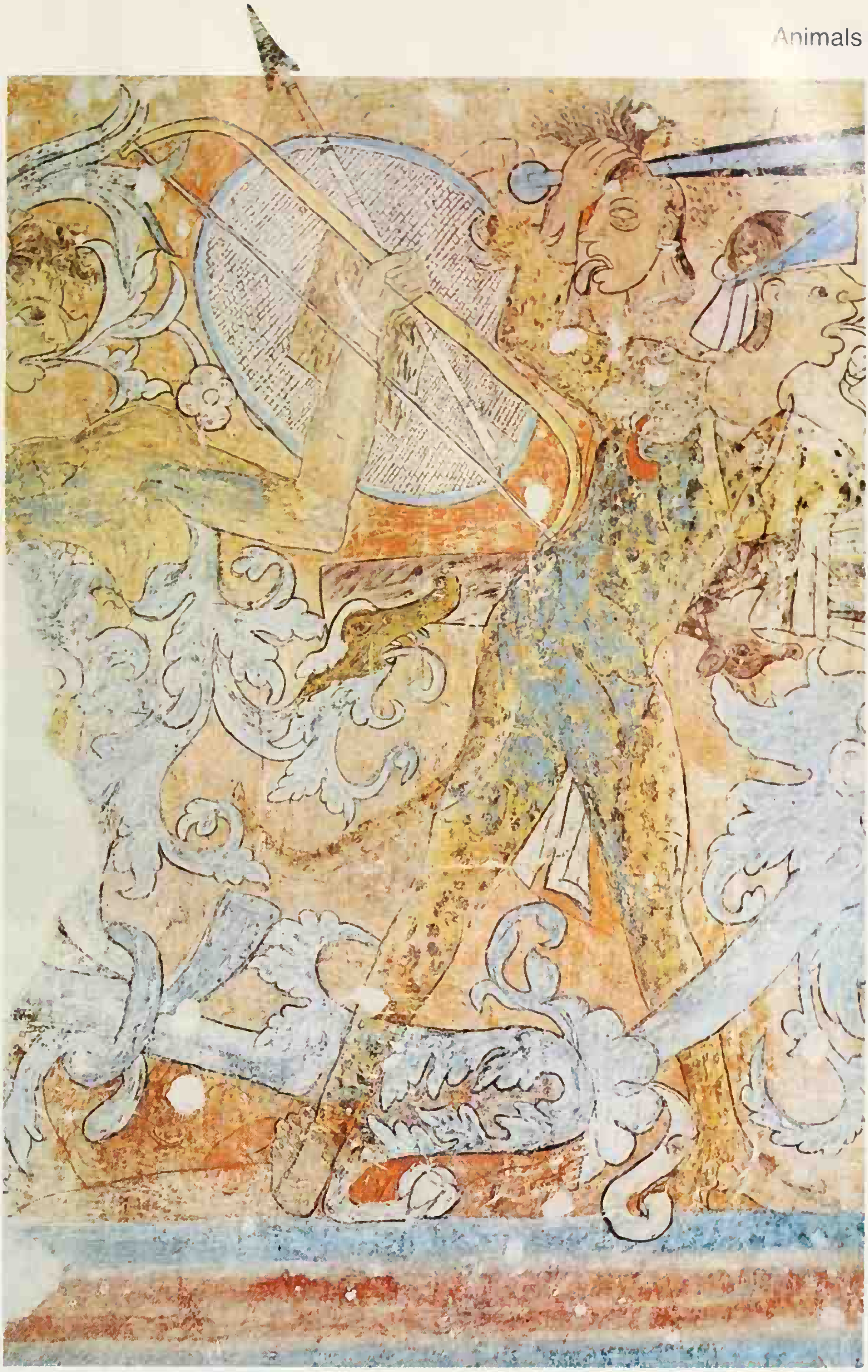
The sacred horses of Freyr illustrate one of the reasons for sacrificing an animal to a god, which is simply to give him a good meal. In the 10th century AD a Christian king of Norway, Olaf Tryggvasoh, went to Thrandheim and seized a stallion which was about to be sacrificed 'for Freyr to eat'. But there is another and deeper motive, for the slaughtered animal may be believed to embody the god and the worshipper who eats its flesh eats the god; if only temporarily and partially, he becomes the god (see FOOD AND DRINK).

In the savagely orgiastic worship of Dionysus the lines between animal, man and god were spectacularly crossed. Dionysus was described as 'mad' and 'raving' (see DIONYSUS). His worshippers, who were predominantly women, went out to the mountainside dressed in the skins of fawns, some of them suckling young animals at the breast, baby deer perhaps or wolf cubs. As they sang and danced they felt a strange excitement. They began to run, finding in themselves superhuman energy and strength, until in frenzy they hunted down animals, wild or tame, and tore them to pieces alive, gnawing at the raw flesh. They behaved, in fact, as if they were animals in animals' skins, suckling their young or tearing the prey. In the release of fierce animal passio their god possessed them: and it seems tha the animals they hunted embodied Dionysu himself so that torn and devoured, h became one with his worshippers.

The same principle, that by imitating a animal and giving free rein to the anima elements in his nature, a man can reach state of frenzied intoxication which break the chains that bind him to his huma condition and makes him a sharer in th divine, appears in many other parts of th world. It lies behind the pagan Europea customs of dancing in animal costumes an masks which the Church tried to suppres and which have been preserved or revived i existing folk ceremonies. The *Liber Poenitentialis* of Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbur in the 7th century, forbids people to dres up as stags or bulls or to put on the heads beasts on the first day of January.

All Creatures Great and Small

Medieval Christianity had its animal symbolism too. The lamb and the fish stood fo Christ, the dove for the Holy Ghost, th sheep for the righteous, the goats for th wicked. Animals were carved in profusion i churches, not only as pleasing decoration but because God made them all and in eac of them could be seen something of the min of the Creator. The man, the lion, the o and the eagle, which stood for the authors the four gospels, also showed that th complete Christian must be a man fo reason, a lion for courage, an ox for sacrific



Constantino Reyes-Valerio

Far left Many Indian gods have animal incarnations: Vishnu as a boar, from a 17th century processional chariot
Left The Minotaur of ancient fable was a man with a bull's head who lurked in the Cretan abyrinth. 'There is a labyrinth in the heart of every man; and to each comes the day when he must reach the centre, and meet the Minotaur' (Mary Renault, *The Last of the Wine*)
Right Part of a mural showing the old Mexican myth of a battle between the gods Tezcatlipoca (the jaguar, standing for night and death) and Huitzilopochtli (the eagle, standing for day and ife)

and an eagle for contemplation.

In the bestiaries fables of animals taken rom pagan authors were given Christian nterpretations, like the fable of the male elephant, an animal in its sagacity so totally uninterested in sex that he would mate only vhen the female gave him the aphrodisiac nandrake plant to eat. The elephants were nterpreted as Adam and Eve in Eden, the nandrake as the forbidden fruit. Not until Eve gave Adam the fruit did he know sexual lesire and the result was the expulsion rom paradise. In the habits of the elephant God had painted the lesson of the Fall for nen to see and understand.

Astrology and Magic

The European magical tradition, also seeing he universe as a logical design and interested n the underlying links connecting it together, nakes much play with animal symbolism. Most of the signs of the zodiac are named for animals and traditional popular astroogical lore is interestingly totemistic, in he sense that people are supposed to have he characteristics of their zodiac animal. Those born under Capricorn, the Goat, are told that they butt away obstacles and leap over difficulties like goats bounding from crag to crag. Those born under Leo, the Lion, are commanding and powerful like the king of beasts, and have fine heads of hair (manes) and large handwriting (paw marks).

In magic an animal is used for its own nherent occult qualities or because of its links with supernatural forces (see CORRESPONDENCES; RITUAL MAGIC). 'If we would call any evil Spirit to the Circle', says the *Fourth Book*, added to Agrippa's *Occult Philosophy* but probably not written by him, 'it first behoveth us to consider and to know his nature, to which of the planets it agreeth . . .' It describes the forms in which the spirits may show themselves, including a she-goat, camel and dove for spirits connected with Venus, a horse or a stag for those of Mars, a cow or a goose for spirits of the moon. Other magical textbooks give similar descriptions, following the tradition which goes back to ancient Mesopotamia that demons appear in animal forms.

The purpose is to help the magician to understand the nature of the spirit or demon which he attempts to summon up and master. Its animal symbols and characteristics contribute to a vivid mental picture of it, on which the magician concentrates during the ceremony in which it is conjured up. Behind this is the old magical belief that to imagine supernatural power, in its appropriate animal or other form, is to be possessed by it, to become it, to control it.

(See also BIRDS, FISH, INSECTS and articles on individual animals.)

FURTHER READING: There is much interesting material in J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (St. Martin's Press, 1980) though not all Frazer's conclusions are now accepted; also in Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New American Library). For the Celts see Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (Columbia University Press, 1967); for Egypt, Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (Harper Row, 1961); for the bull, J. R. Conrad, *The Horn and the Sword* (Greenwood, 1973).

ANIMISM

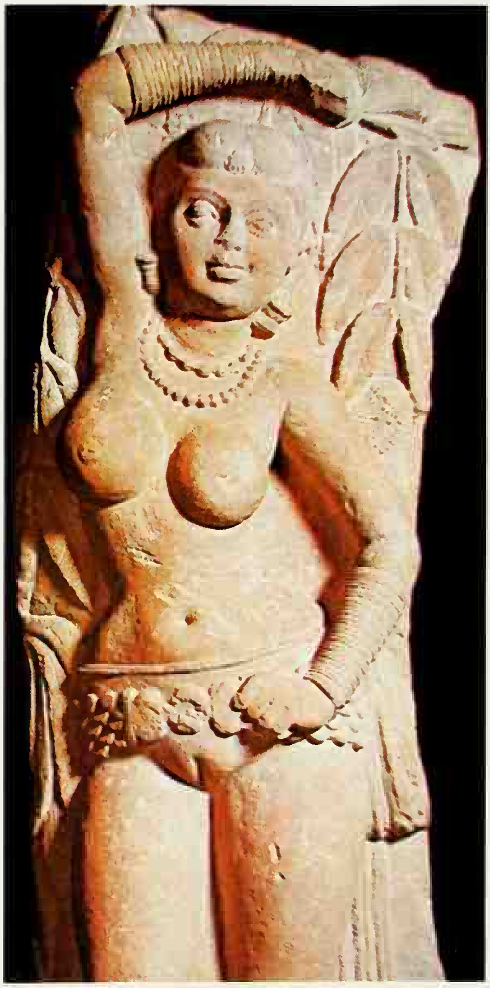
ANIMISM IS THE BELIEF that all things animate and inanimate, all the phenomena of Nature, are possessed of an individual spirit or soul. It is the view of the world, to quote a famously eloquent passage in *The Golden Bough*, 'that peopled with a multitude of individual spirits every rock and hill, every tree and flower, every brook and river, every breeze that blew and every cloud that flecked with silvery white the blue expanse of heaven...'

The word comes from the Latin words *animus* and *anima*, which could mean 'breath' or 'life' or 'soul' and were essentially connected with the concept of the life-breath (and animism must be clearly distinguished from animatism, the belief that a single life-force is present in all the phenomena of the world).

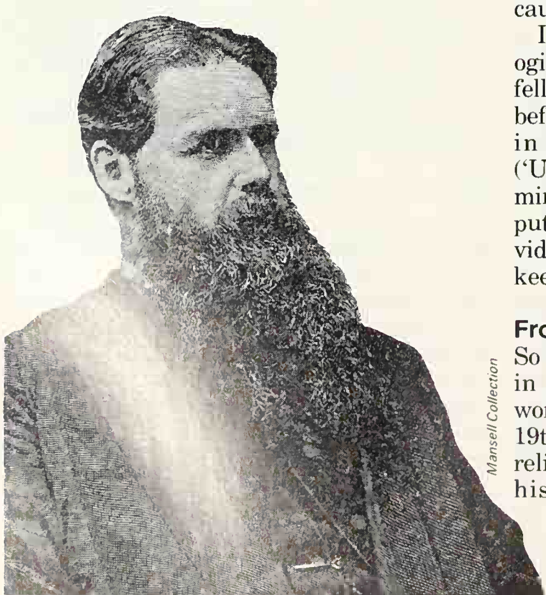
It is doubtful whether any single religious belief has been more widely and tenaciously held than animism. In Greek mythology there were the nymphs, the spirits of springs and rivers, trees and hills and caves, imagined as beautiful young girls. Running water, streams and wells, were the province of the Naiads, while the Dryads and Hamadryads were the spirits of trees. Nymphs attended the great goddess Artemis in mountain and meadow, and in the waves of the ocean frolicked the Oceanides and the Nereids, one of whom was the mother of the great hero Achilles (see NYMPHS).

British folklore, similarly, is full of local country spirits – brownies and boggarts, and the knockers who held sway in Cornish tin mines.

Animism, however, is far from dead. In Africa, New Guinea and the Pacific to this day, the spirits of animals and trees, thunder and lightning, wind and rain, still retain much of their ancient hold on human esteem, and their displeasure can provide a convincing explanation of otherwise inexplicable misfortune.



Michael Holford



Mansell Collection

Animism is the belief that spirits inhabit everything in Nature: every hill, tree and stream, every rock and cloud, every stone and pool, has its own spirit *Above* Indian tree spirit
Sir Edward Tylor (*below*), Professor of Anthropology at Oxford University, put forward the theory of animism as an explanation of the origin of religion in his book, published in 1871

In Burma the minor spirits called *nats* can cause bad luck if they are unwisely neglected. The house nat has his respected shrine in each home, bamboo nat shrines stand by the roads and among trees, and the blossom in a Burmese girl's hair does due honour to the nats. And even the biggest and brashest Western-style hotels in Thailand have unobtrusive little shrines to the local spirits called *phis*.

The permeation of everything by spirits means that there is a complicated network of relationships between different spirits and between spirits and mankind. Human beings, if they are wise, move with care and caution in this dangerous labyrinth.

It makes good sense, for instance, to apologise politely to the spirit of a tree before felling it, or propitiate the spirits of a mine before extracting its ore. In the silver mines in Peru today a little figure of El Tio ('Uncle') stands close to the shafts, and miners give him offerings of cola leaves and put lighted cigarettes in his mouth to provide him with a propitiatory smoke. Just to keep him sweet.

From Animism to Monotheism

So widespread and persistent is this belief in a multitude of spirits populating the world that animism was put forward in the 19th century as the minimum definition of religion and the explanation of its origin. In his influential book *Primitive Culture* (1871), Sir Edward Tylor, who was Professor of Anthropology at Oxford, argued that animism was the earliest stage in the development of religion.

Thinking people, he suggested, were early impressed by two groups of questions. What makes the difference between a living body and a dead one, and what causes sleep, trance, disease and death? And secondly, what are the human forms which are seen in dreams and visions? By pondering on these matters, early philosophers probably drew the obvious inference, that every person has both a life and a phantom, both of which are connected with the body. Life enables the body to feel and act, while the phantom is its image or second self. Both can leave the body during sleep and unconsciousness, and at death.

Tylor went on to argue that primitive man assumed that the life and the phantom were manifestations of the same 'soul'. From this emerged the idea of the soul as a ghost or apparition, and this concept in its turn produced the idea of the personal soul or spirit, which could leave the body and did leave it at death. Once this was realized, Tylor suggested, early man would have gone on to conclude that, since human beings had souls, so did all natural phenomena – trees, streams, rocks, clouds and the rest – have souls that animated them and gave them life.

In the next step, according to this theory, people began to think of a god of the winds in general instead of, or in addition to, a spirit of each individual wind, a deity of the woods as well as the spirit of each tree, and so on. Great gods and goddesses emerged from the multitude of lesser spirits. In this way, it was argued, animism gave way to polytheism, the worship of many gods, from which some more enlightened peoples in time advanced to monotheism, the worship of one solitary deity.

The Modern View

The theory had a long run, but more recent study approaches the origin of religion along different lines. The Egyptian Pyramid Texts (c 2400 BC), the earliest written records of religion, do not reveal any notion of a clear-cut division between soul and body in human nature. On the contrary, they regard a human being as a compound of a physical body and various psychic elements, of which the soul was only one.

Similar, though less elaborate conceptions were held by many ancient peoples, including the Mesopotamians, the Hebrews and the Homeric Greeks. Tylor's dualistic idea of the soul as the inner essential self, independent of the body, did not emerge until some time later in India (c 700 BC) and Greece (c 600 BC).

The origin of the idea of deity is also far more complicated than Tylor supposed. The evidence of archeology indicates that the earliest form of deity was the Mother Goddess, the deification of the female principle, which expressed man's need for fertility and new life.

(See also ASTRAL BODY; BREATH; GHOST; MOTHER GODDESS; RELIGION; SOUL.)

S.G.F.BRANDON*

St Anthony of Egypt is best known for the attacks made on him by demons. It has been suggested that these experiences were caused by the acid from which L.S.D. is derived

ST ANTHONY

A CHRISTIAN ASCETIC, noted for his victorious struggles against demons, St Anthony was born in Egypt, c 250 AD. St Athanasius, in the following century, wrote a biography of him, which says that he was brought up as a Christian by his wealthy parents. He was extremely devout as a boy and was too sensitive to be sent to school, so that he never learned to read or write. His parents died before he was 20 and he lived alone; 'he took no care for anything whatsoever except his soul, and he began to train himself in the habits of the strictest abstinence and self-denial.'

He lived on bread, salt and water, fasting for three or four days at a time and going without sleep for long periods. The Devil tempted him with anxieties over worldly matters, by sending him 'filthy and maddening thoughts' and by appearing to him as a woman, but the saint was able to resist these assaults and concentrate on God.

When he went to live in a tomb near his village, he was attacked by multitudes of demons, which raged at him and pummelled him into unconsciousness, but he defied them. They also appeared to him in frightening animal forms,. a famous episode because it was portrayed by painters of later generations. These demonic visitations may have been a natural result of the privations which the saint imposed on himself, and St Athanasius called them 'phantasms' or hallucinations but did not doubt that they were sent by the Enemy. 'The whole race of devils,' he said, 'is beyond measure an envious one and it is altogether jealous of all mankind and particularly of the monks, for they cannot bear to see . . . heavenly lives led upon the earth.'

More recently, it has been suggested that the saint may have eaten bread infected with the fungus *Claviceps purpurea*, which contains lysergic acid, from which the drug L.S.D. is derived.

When he was 31, St Anthony withdrew from human company altogether, shutting himself away in an old fort where he spent the next 20 years. Food was thrown in to him over the wall. He continued his ascetic self-denials 'and to the day of his death,' according to St Athanasius, 'he never touched his body with water . . . and he never dipped his feet in water without the sternest necessity.' A colony of disciples gathered round him, living in caves and huts, and vainly begging him for spiritual guidance. In the end he agreed to help them and spent several years teaching them and organizing them into a community. He is regarded. as the founder of Christian monasticism.

The saint retreated from mankind again and spent the rest of his life as a solitary in the desert, though he received occasional visitors and went to Alexandria twice.

St Anthony and the Demons

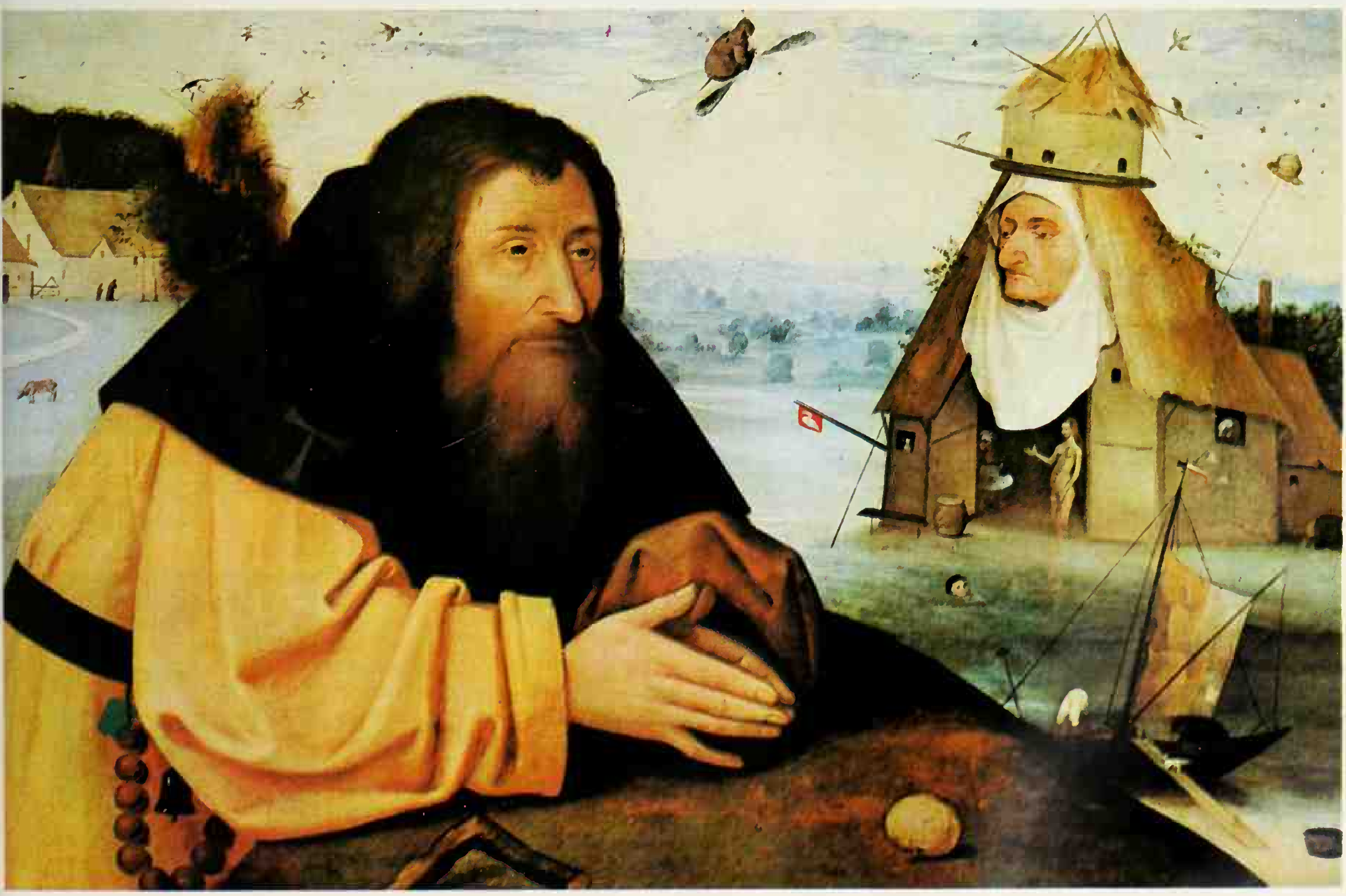
From a biography of the Saint, written in the 4th century AD:

Now it is very easy for the Enemy to create apparitions and appearances of such a character that they shall be deemed real and actual objects, and phantasms of this kind caused a phantom earthquake, and they rent asunder the four corners of the house and entered therein in a body from all sides. One had the form of a lion and another had the appearance of a wolf and another was like unto a panther and all the others were in the forms and similitudes of serpents and vipers and scorpions. The lion was roaring as a lion roars when he is about to slay; the bull was ready to gore with his horns; the panther was prepared to spring; and the snakes and the vipers were hissing, and they appeared to be in the act of hurling themselves upon him; and the sounds which they made and the forms in which they showed themselves were terrible.

Now the blessed man ANTHONY was not disturbed by their commotion, and his mind remained wholly undisturbed. And as he was lying down he laughed at these phantoms . . .

St Athanasius
The Life of Saint Anthony

The bizarre and nightmare visions of St Anthony have fired the imagination of many artists. *The Temptation of St Anthony* by the Dutch painter Hieronymous Bosch



Michael Holford

ANTICHRIST

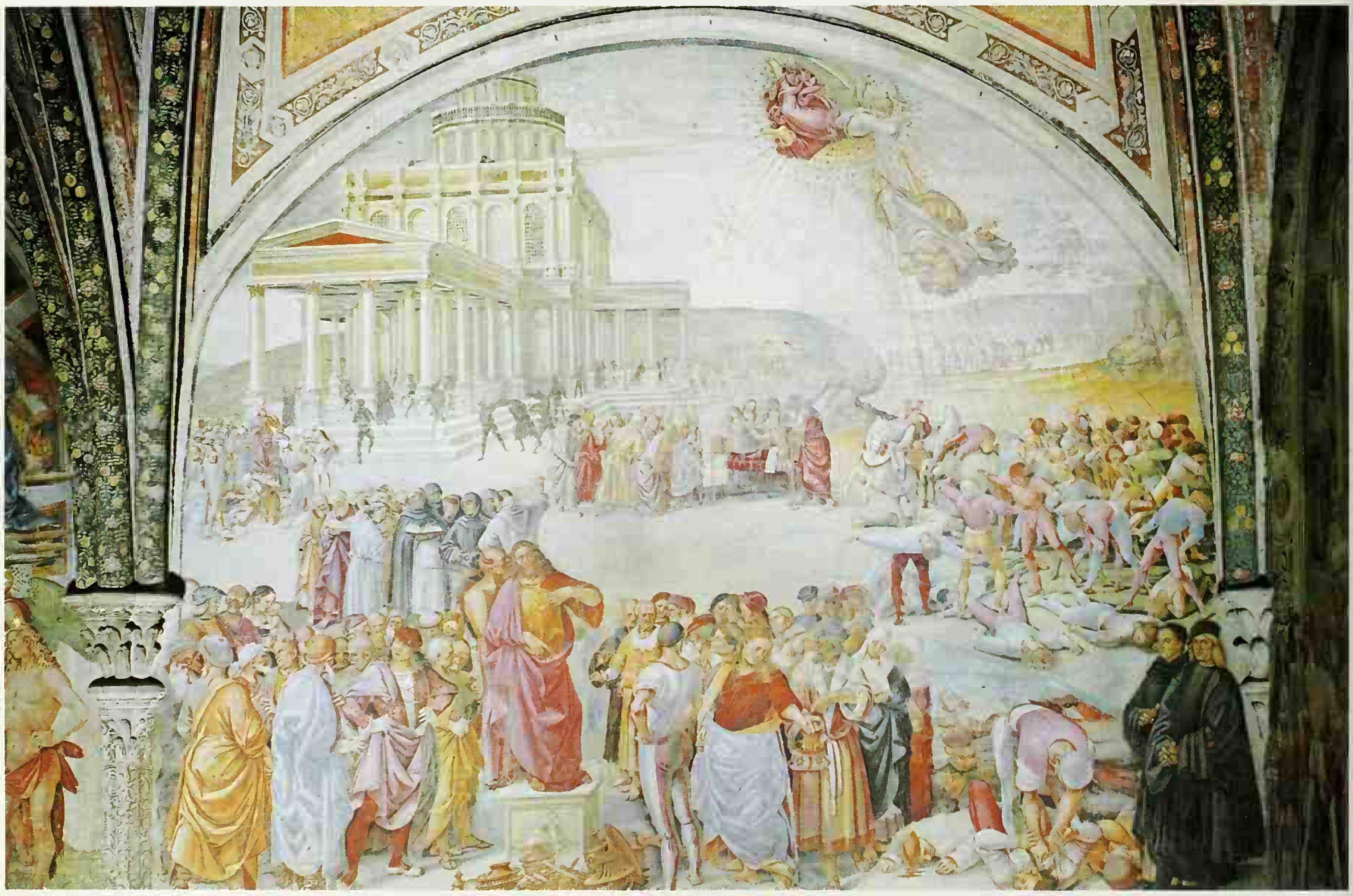
THE FEAR OF A MESSIAH of evil, who would come with war, plague, famine and destruction to enslave the world, haunted men for hundreds of years in Europe, rather as the fear of nuclear war makes an ominous background to our lives now; though with a consolation we lack, the belief that Antichrist would eventually be overthrown by God. As Christ's opposite, Antichrist would claim to be God and would work miracles, raising the dead, walking on water, healing the sick, turning stones into bread, but his miracles would be shams. The Jews also expected the coming of the evil power and it was said that he would be bald, with one eye bigger than the other, his left arm longer than his right, and deaf in his right ear; right being traditionally the side of good.

The early Christians adopted the Jewish belief in a coming titanic battle between God and an evil adversary. The first human model for the adversary was the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who captured Jerusalem in the 2nd century BC and used the temple for the worship of pagan gods.

In the New Testament 2 Thessalonians (chapter 2) predicts the coming of 'the man of lawlessness, the son of perdition', who will claim to be God. Revelation (chapter 13) predicts the appearance of the Great Beast 666, supported by a second beast, who was later identified as Antichrist. The first and second letters of John describe rebels inside the Christian flock itself as 'antichrists', which set a precedent for the later employment of the word as a term of abuse, used by Christians for other Christians who failed to agree with them.

Opponents of Popes Boniface VIII and John XXII labelled each of them as Antichrist and many Protestants later regarded all Popes as Antichrist, an idea which lingers on among a few extreme Protestants. In this century the Kaiser and Hitler were both described as Antichrist.
(See also GREAT BEAST.)

In this 15th century fresco by Signorelli the Antichrist is shown working false miracles and deluding the people, but is overthrown by an angel in the sky



Scala

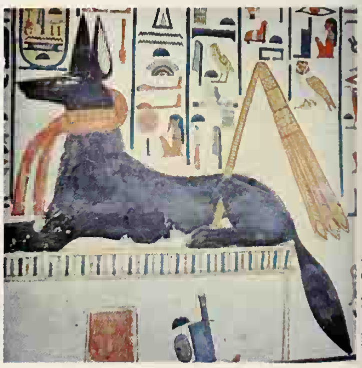
Antisemitism

Hostility to Jews, based partly on Jewish religious exclusiveness and partly on myths about supposed Jewish [illegible] characteristics; common in Europe since the establishment of Christianity, and one of the ugliest principles of the Nazi programme in Germany.
See NAZISM.

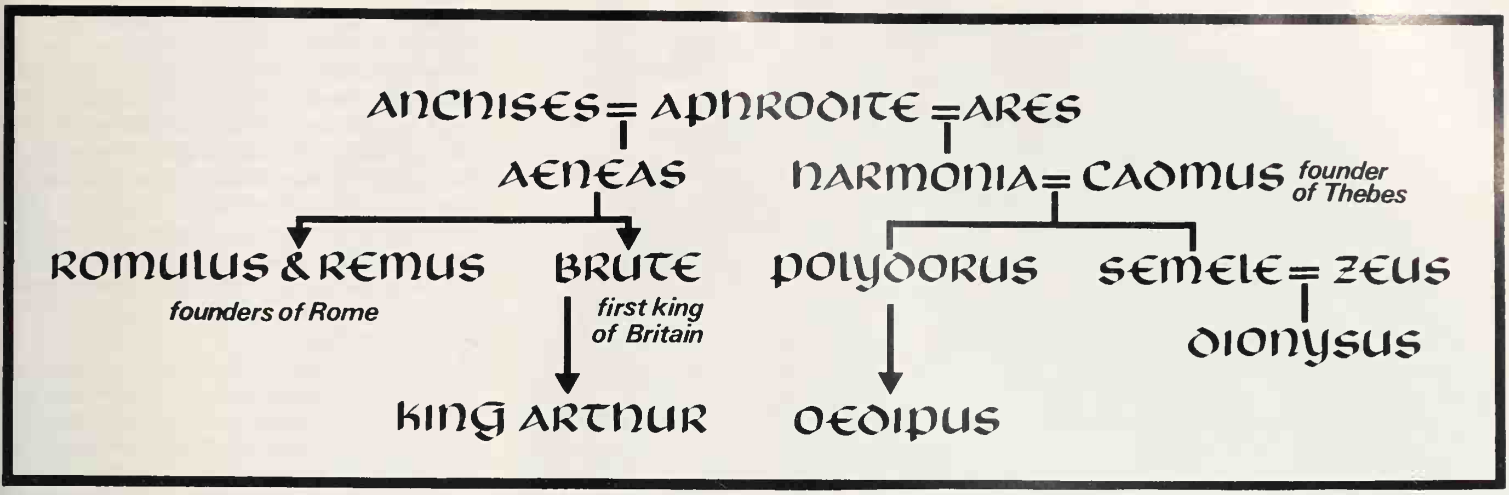
Popperfoto

Anubis

Egyptian god of the dead, 'lord of the mummy wrappings' and inventor of embalming, who led the dead to the place of judgement after death and supervised the weighing of the heart; shown as a black jackal or a dog, both of which roamed the cemeteries in the Egyptian desert.
See JUDGEMENT OF THE DEAD.



William MacQuitty



Golden Aphrodite, lover of laughter, born of the sea-foam, was the Greek goddess of love and beauty. Homer refers to 'the beauty of her neck and her lovely breasts and sparkling eyes'

APHRODITE

APHRODITE WAS THE ancient Greek goddess of love, beauty, generation and fertility. She was, naturally, a popular goddess and her cult was widespread throughout almost all of the Greek world. The Romans identified her with their goddess Venus. She had famous sanctuaries at Corinth and on the island of Cythera, at Paphos and Amathus in Cyprus, and at Eryx in the west of Sicily. She figures prominently in Greek mythology, beginning with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer (8th century BC) and the poetry of Hesiod (c 700 BC).

Despite her great popularity and important place in Greek religion and culture, Aphrodite was not in origin a native Greek goddess. Her cult came to Greece from Cyprus, where she was known as Kypris (Lady of Cyprus). Aphrodite was probably a local Cypriot version of the great mother goddess, whose worship under various names was almost universal throughout the Near and Middle East in ancient times, and was of great antiquity. The many primitive idols found in Cyprus, depicting a naked female figure with the sexual attributes grossly emphasized, are probably archaic representations of this mother goddess, to whom the ancient inhabitants of Cyprus gave the name of Aphrodite.

The Foam-Born

There has been much learned but inconclusive discussion about the original meaning of the goddess's name. The Greeks, from the time of Hesiod, tried to explain it as deriving from the word *aphros*, 'foam', in the sense that Aphrodite was 'foam-born'. Hesiod in his *Theogony* accounts for this 'foam-birth' in a strange way. Describing the origin of the universe, he tells how Earth gave birth to various beings through cohabiting with Uranus, the personification of Heaven. Uranus proved a tyrannous sire and imprisoned his offspring within the body of Earth, so that she groaned with the burden. Release came finally when Cronus, one of the sons of Earth, with the connivance of his mother, castrated his father. Cronus threw the severed genitals into the sea, and a white foam gathered around them, from which a maiden emerged. According to Hesiod, 'first she drew near to holy Cythera, and from there, afterwards, she came to sea-girt Cyprus, and came forth an awful and lovely goddess, and grass grew up about her beneath her shapely feet.'

This idyllic scene has been immortalized by the Renaissance artist Botticelli in his painting, *The Birth of Venus*.

This strange tale, so shocking in conception and yet so poetic in its presentation of Aphrodite, may provide a clue to the origin of some of the Greek myths about the origin of the universe. On Hittite clay tablets there has been found an even stranger and more primitive myth of a primordial act of castration: the sky-god Alalus is emasculated by a divine hero Kumarbis, who swallows the genitals and becoming impregnated by them, gives birth to the storm god. Since it is known that the Achaeans (one of the earliest of the peoples we call Greeks), had dealings with the Hittites of Asia Minor, it is possible that Hesiod drew on some tradition that derived ultimately from this region.

Bronze head, 2nd century BC, of Aphrodite, goddess of love and the supreme embodiment of feminine beauty, originally a Cypriot mother goddess

Michael Holford

The Hittite myth does not deal with the origin of a goddess like Aphrodite. But the similarity of the theme of generation resulting from the severed genitals of a god is remarkable, especially since Aphrodite personified the principle of generation. According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, Aphrodite was also called Philommedes (member-loving) because she 'sprang from the genitals'. The Christian scholar Clement of Alexandria, writing in the early 3rd century against pagan religion, asserts with reference to the name Philommedes that in the rites of Aphrodite, her birth from the sea-foam was symbolized by the presentation of a cake of salt and a phallus.

Desire as a Universal Force

In his account of the origin of things, Hesiod still further emphasizes the fundamental sexual significance of Aphrodite by associating her with Eros: 'And with her went Eros, and comely Himeros (Desire) followed her at her birth.' The Eros of Hesiod is not the young god of love or the mischievous Cupid of later mythology. He is a powerful creative force, described by Hesiod as one who 'unnerves the limbs and overcomes the mind and wise counsels of all gods and all men'.

It is evident that Hesiod regarded the traditional gods as deifications of basic universal forces. Seeing the creation of the universe in sexual terms, as the product of the intercourse of various pairs of cosmic beings, he felt the need for some factor that would unite and make fruitful the unions of the various pairs. In Eros he saw such a factor but he probably also drew on a primitive folk-tradition, where this view already existed. For the Athenian dramatist Aeschylus, in the 5th century BC, gives eloquent expression to the idea in some lines that have survived from his lost play of the *Danaids*. 'Love moves the pure Heaven to wed the Earth; and Love (*eros*) takes hold on Earth to join in marriage. And the rain, dropping from the husband Heaven, impregnates Earth, and she brings forth for men pasture for flocks and corn, the life of man.'

It would seem that the ancient Greeks had already made a god of sexual potency an agent in the creation of the universe, under the name of Eros, long before Aphrodite entered their religion. Mindful of this, Hesiod evidently seeks to account for the later appearance of Aphrodite as the goddess of sexual love by using the strange and probably foreign myth of the castration of a primordial deity. By so doing he also manages to explain her non-Greek name of Aphrodite and to associate her with Eros, the older deification of the mysterious force that prompted the union of the sexes for the purpose of procreation. (See also EROS.)

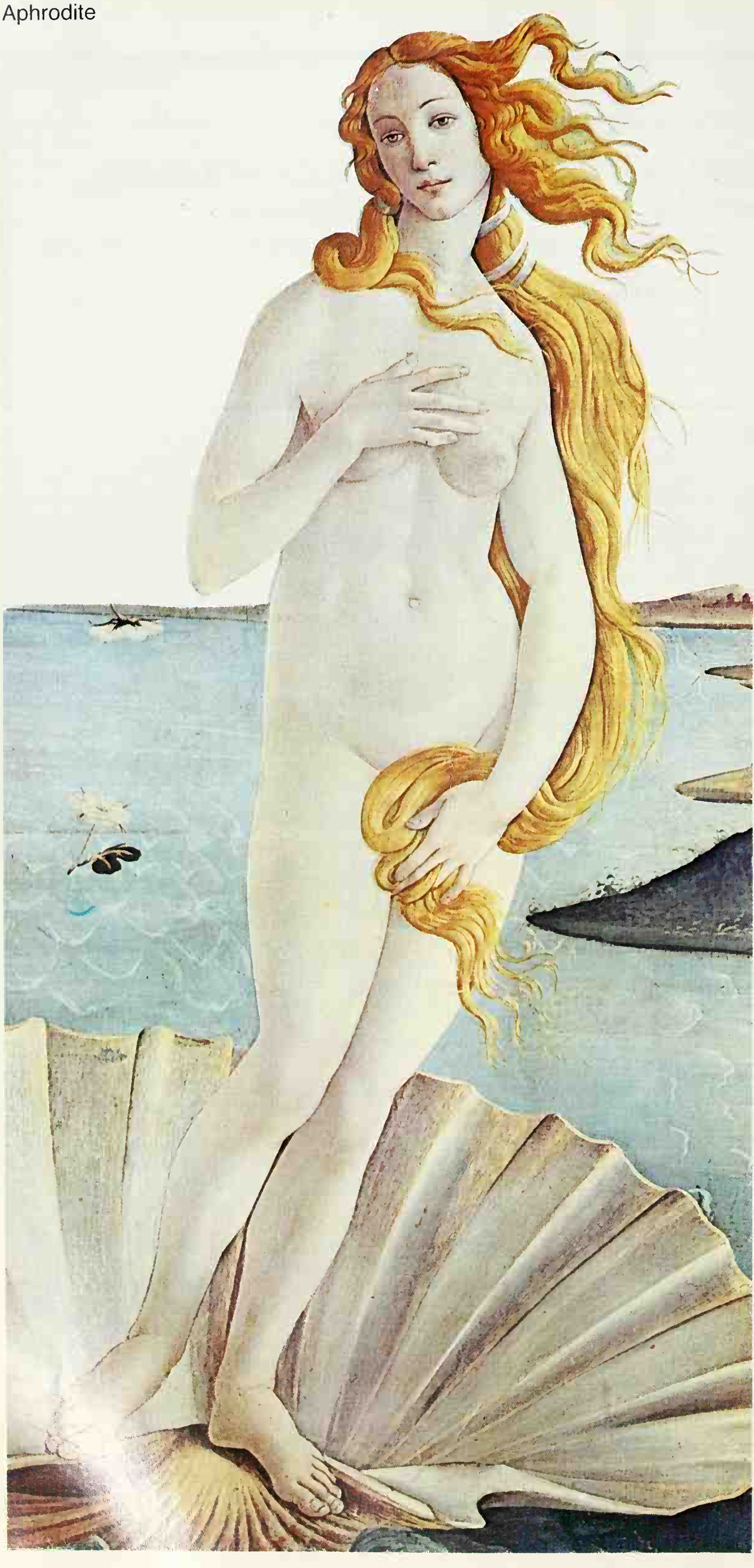
Love and War

Hesiod's account of Aphrodite is especially important because, though somewhat later in date than Homer, he is aware of Aphrodite as a newcomer among the Greek deities; in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* she has already been included in the company of the Olympian gods. Homer makes her the daughter of the supreme god Zeus and Dione, an obscure goddess. However, two small facts may preserve some tradition of Aphrodite's eastern origin. In Homer she is the wife of Hephaestus, the lame fire-god and divine craftsman, who was certainly of oriental origin. And her love affair with the war god Ares recalls the fact that some eastern goddesses, including Ishtar of Mesopotamia and Anat-Astarte of Canaan and Phoenicia, combined the roles of goddess of fertility and goddess of war.

In the Homeric poems, Aphrodite is often portrayed in a rather undignified manner, although she is 'golden Aphrodite', the daughter of Zeus. In the *Iliad* the goddess Hera is depicted as consulting her when she wanted to beguile her husband Zeus. The goddess asks Aphrodite to give her 'love and desire, wherewith thou art wont to subdue all immortals and mortal men.' Aphrodite helps by lending Hera the embroidered girdle that adorned her breast, 'wherein are fashioned all manner of allurements'. Such a service was probably deemed proper to the goddess of love, even though it assisted in the deception of the supreme god Zeus.

But more surprising, and contrary to our ideas of the status of a goddess, are two other episodes in which Aphrodite is involved. The first occurs in the *Iliad* in a lively account of the fighting before the walls of Troy. The Greek hero Diomedes severely wounds Aeneas, a Trojan leader who was the son of Aphrodite by Anchises, a mortal man. Aphrodite, seeing her human son in danger of death, intervenes to save him. When Diomedes recognizes the goddess he is not deterred but lunges at her with his spear. Aphrodite is wounded in the wrist, and the immortal *ichor*, which the Greek deities have instead of mortal blood, pours out. Aphrodite gives a piercing scream, drops the wounded Aeneas and flees, while Diomedes derides her.

The idea that a goddess could be wounded by the weapon of a mortal man is certainly strange, and we can only wonder why the Homeric poet depicted the goddess of love as suffering so humiliating and painful an experience. He seems, while recognizing



Giraudon

Detail from Botticelli's *Birth of Venus:* the goddess riding on a shell, an emblem of woman, over the sea from whose foam she was born

her divinity, to mock the idea that she should participate in war. It may be that in this way he rebuts some older tradition of a warlike aspect which the Greek Aphrodite had inherited from her eastern origins.

Even more degrading is the episode in the *Odyssey*, where a minstrel sings of the illicit love of Ares and Aphrodite. He tells how Helius, the sun god, reported their liaison to Hephaestus, the lame and deformed husband of Aphrodite. Furious at the news, the craftsman god plans the punishment of the guilty pair. He forges a net too fine to be seen but too strong to be broken, and spreads it about the bed in his house. Giving out that he is leaving to visit his favourite sanctuary, he sets the trap for the lovers. Ares seizes the opportunity of the husband's departure to visit Aphrodite. Warned by Helius, Hephaestus turns back and discovers the lovers together in his bed, where they are enmeshed by the invisible but imprisoning bonds.

Hephaestus calls the other gods to witness the shameful spectacle, and he demands that Zeus pay back the bridal gifts before he releases his shameless daughter and her paramour. The sea god Poseidon finally persuades the angry Hephaestus to let the couple go, by guaranteeing the payment of damages by Ares. The extraordinary episode ends by describing the 'laughter-loving' Aphrodite's retreat to Paphos in Cyprus, 'where is her demesne and fragrant altar. There the Graces anointed her with immortal oil... and clothed her in a lovely raiment, a wonder to behold.'

Little, unfortunately, is known of the nature and form of the rites which were performed in the various temples of Aphrodite. At Corinth and in Cyprus she was served by sacred prostitutes; and at Abydos there was a temple of Aphrodite Porne (Aphrodite the Harlot). This connection with ritual prostitution attests Aphrodite's eastern origin; for the custom prevailed at the cult centres of many eastern goddesses.

Aphrodite, however, was also the divine patron of marriage. At Athens, under the title of Pandemos (of all the people), her cult was dignified and unobjectionable. She had, in fact, many sides to her nature: she was a sea goddess, a goddess of animals, of gardens, and even of death – there was a small statue at Delphi called 'Aphrodite by the Tomb'. This last association is not surprising, for the great mother goddess was also a subterranean deity concerned with the dead.

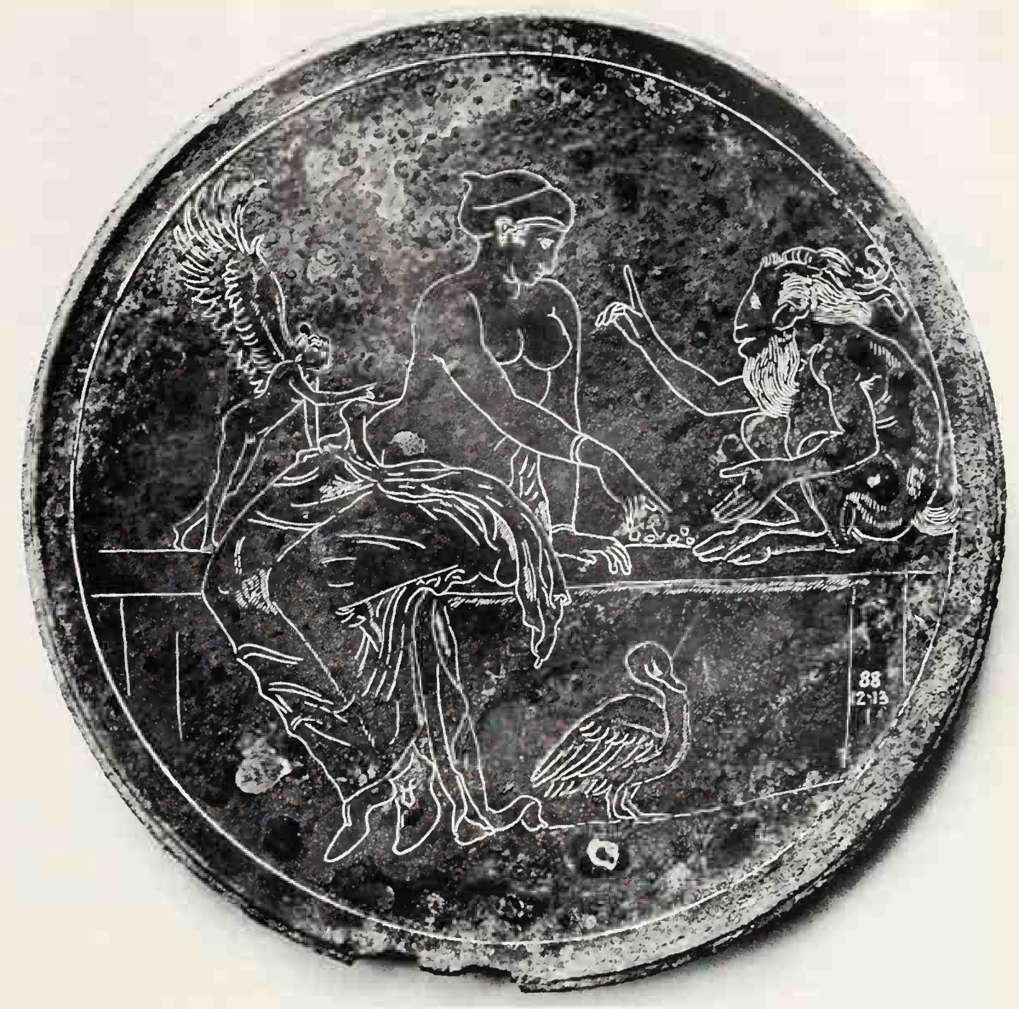
In mythology Aphrodite was also associated with the three Graces or *Charites* (personifications of charm, grace and beauty) and with the Hours (*Horae*), goddesses of the seasons. Various animals were connected with her (including doves, sparrows, swans, dolphins and mussels) and forms of vegetation (roses, myrtle, cypress and pomegranates).

Anemones for Adonis

Aphrodite's connection with Adonis (well known through Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis*) reveals most clearly her original association with the Great Goddess of the ancient Near East. The story of Adonis appears in its most complete form in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid (17 AD). Adonis is the incestuous offspring of Cinyras, King of Cyprus, and his daughter Myrrha who, in consequence of her sin, is transformed into a myrrh tree (the myrrh, exuded from the bark, is explained as the tears of Myrrha). This metamorphosis of his mother occurs before Adonis is born and his subsequent birth from the myrrh tree is significant of his origin as a vegetation god.

Grown to a beautiful youth, Adonis attracts the attention of Aphrodite, who falls passionately in love with him. Despite her warnings of the risks of hunting, Adonis is killed by a wild boar. Aphrodite is distraught with grief at his death and, to commemorate the tragedy, she causes the anemone to spring from his blood.

The death and resurrection of Adonis was celebrated annually in a ritual lamentation by women over an effigy of the dead god in many places, including Athens. In the Greek city of Alexandria in Egypt the sacred marriage of Aphrodite and Adonis was celebrated, followed next day by lamentation as an effigy of the dead god was taken out and cast into the sea. 'Gardens of Adonis' were also made, in which the forced growth of seedlings symbolized the resurrection of Adonis. The cult and myth of Adonis doubtless came to Greece from Cyprus with that of Aphrodite.



Aphrodite in frivolous mood gambling with the god Pan: 4th century BC

The Goddess in Art

The portrayal of Aphrodite in art deserves special notice. Greek classical art of the 5th century BC presents the goddess as a dignified figure, robed in contemporary costume, as in the famous Parthenon frieze. A delicate exception is the representation of Aphrodite rising from the sea on the Ludovisi throne, where the body of the goddess is depicted as only lightly veiled.

The first notable figure of a nude Aphrodite was made in the 4th century BC by Praxiteles. The work was commissioned by the people of Cos, who rejected it for the traditional draped figure. It was accepted by the citizens of Cnidos, and became one of the most famous statues of the ancient world. The goddess was shown laying aside her robe, preparing for the bath; the original statue is known only through later Roman copies. The Cnidian Aphrodite inspired many later Hellenistic and Roman statues of which the Venus de Milo, now in the Louvre at Paris, is the most celebrated.

S.G.F.BRANDON

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The perfect embodiment of the Greek spirit, Apollo was perhaps the best-loved of all the Greek gods. Through his famous oracle at Delphi, he exercised a conciliatory influence on Greek politics, and he was believed to have founded many of the Greek colonies

APOLLO

APOLLO, brightest and best of the ancient Greek gods, was the god of music, archery, prophecy, healing, the care of animals and young growing creatures; and from the 5th century BC, at least, he was identified with the sun.

He was the only Greek god to have specific functions in each of the domains allotted separately to the three gods of the sky (Zeus), the sea (Poseidon), and the earth (Hades). His titles bear witness to these functions. He was, for example, Apollo Asgelatas – 'god of radiance'; Embasios – 'favouring embarkation'; and Arotrios – 'god of ploughing'. His titles, of which well over 300 have survived in ancient authors and inscriptions on stone, show that Apollo was a god much loved by people in all walks of life.

He was the inspiration of a great deal of ancient Greek painting, poetry and music. More than any other figure in Greek mythology or history, he embodied the spirit of Greek civilization. In art he was depicted as the ideal type of young, virile beauty.

In historical times Apollo was worshipped by all the Greeks. He plays a prominent part in the Homeric epics, and in the *Iliad* is the ally of the Trojans. In Homer, he is usually called Phoebus Apollo – 'bright Apollo'. Other epithets associated with him refer to his deadly aim as an archer, or to his silver bow.

But this most typically Greek of gods, if he did not come originally from Asia Minor, certainly incorporated many of the features of a prehistoric non-Greek deity. It is possible that the name Apollo is of Greek origin, although modern scholars are divided as to whether the root-meaning of the word is 'strength', 'sheep-fold' or 'assembly of voters'. But at an early date the original Greek god seems to have been identified with a Hittite god named Apulunas or Appaliunaas, and the Greeks themselves associated Apollo not only with a legendary northern people, the Hyperboreans, but also with Lycia, a country in what is now south-west Turkey. Apollo's mother's name, Leto, has often been connected by scholars with a Lycian word meaning 'woman'. The Greeks, however, were aware of an ambiguity in the title Lykeios (Lycian) often given to Apollo. Greek poets punned (and in ancient Greek puns had a serious, not a humorous significance) on the associations this title could have with Apollo's fame as a slayer of wolves – *lykos* being the Greek for 'wolf'.

Apollo's eastern connections partly account for an atmosphere of mystery which was another of his aspects. In time, he accumulated many exotic titles, some of them of undoubtedly non-Greek origin, and as the god of oracles he was known throughout the Greek world as Loxias – 'the ambiguous one'.

Apollo and his twin sister Armetis were the children of Zeus, king of the gods, and Leto, the Titaness. According to one version of the birth myth, Delos was the only land which would receive Leto as she felt her time to give birth drawing near. Other places feared the power of the god she would give birth to. In historic times, Apollo's birth at Delos was celebrated by an important festival held in that tiny island each spring. According to the historian Herodotus, the Hyperboreans came every year with offerings which they brought all the way from their northern homeland. There was also an oracle of Apollo at Delos.

Apollo at Delphi

Apollo's most important oracular shrine, however, was at Delphi on the Greek mainland, a place which preserves to this day much of the extraordinary, religious atmosphere which it had in ancient times. The Homeric Hymn to Apollo describes how the god came to this place 'beneath snowy Parnassus' and performed – while still a child, according to some accounts – one of his greatest exploits:

> Nearby there was a fair stream, where the Prince, son of Zeus, killed with an arrow from his bow a dragoness, a fat great wild monster, who had done much harm to men on earth and to their long-shanked flocks, for she was a blood-reeking bane.

Later tradition embroidered this story, and the female dragon became a male snake, a python, from which derived Apollo's title of Pythian, often accorded him in his connection with the oracle at Delphi. It is often said – and the belief was already prevalent in antiquity – that the dragon or snake represented an earlier earth cult which was ousted by Apollo. But there is nothing in this original account, in the Homeric Hymn, to suggest that the dragoness was in any way oracular, or the guardian of an oracle, and the theory seems to spring from a later interpretation of what, in the first place, was a simple dragon story of a type common in Greece and elsewhere.

The ruins of Apollo's temple and the small *omphalos* or navel-stone which the Greeks regarded as marking the true centre of the earth can still be seen. Apollo was sometimes shown in Greek art as sitting on the stone.

The oracle was run in historical times by priests who interpreted the more or less incoherent mutterings of the Pythia, a middle-aged woman dressed by convention as a maiden, who sat on a tripod, inhaling the fumes of barley, hemp and chopped bay-leaves burned over an oil-flame; she was believed to be in direct communication with the god. For over a thousand years the oracle was regularly consulted by both Greeks and Romans (and by orientals as well), who were anxious to know the divine purpose in relation to future events. The oracle's replies were almost always obscure or ambiguous, and often wrong, but Socrates was a firm believer, perhaps because Apollo had declared him to be the wisest of all men.

The oracle was closed for three months in winter, and during this time Apollo was supposed to be absent, visiting his special people, the Hyperboreans, who danced, sang and feasted in his honour.

It was through the oracle at Delphi that Apollo exercised his chief political influence in the Greek world, which can be summed up as moderate, conciliatory and conservative. His advice was considered especially valuable by anyone intending to found a colony overseas. It was here, too, that Apollo chiefly operated as a moral force in Greek life. The three famous maxims, or 'programmes' as the ancients called them, were carved on a column in the fore-temple at Delphi: 'Know thyself', 'Nothing in excess' and 'Go surety, and ruin is at hand'. They – or the first two, at least – epitomized that awareness and moderation which are usually taken to have been the Greek ideal.

Apollo lasted at Delphi well into the Christian era. He delivered his last oracle in the year 362 AD, to the physician of the Emperor Julian, the Byzantine ruler who tried to restore paganism after Christianity had become the official religion of the Byzantine Empire. 'Tell the king,' said the oracle, 'that the curiously built temple has fallen to the ground, that bright Apollo no longer has a roof over his head, or prophetic laurel, or babbling spring. Yes, even the murmuring water has dried up.' (See also ORACLES.)

Wolf and Mouse God

The primitive deity who developed, partly by assimilating some of the characteristics of an eastern god, into the glorious figure of classical Greece was very probably a wolf god, worshipped by herdsmen for his power over wolves, which meant that he could keep wolves away from their flocks. In later times, Apollo's connection with flocks and herds was not emphasized as much as his more Apollo, in common with many other Greek deities, had a special tree which was sacred to him. This was the laurel (called *Daphne* in Greek). A very ancient legend tells how the nymph, Daphne, was overwhelmed by the god's amorous attentions and fled away from him. Luckily, she was turned into a laurel tree.

Apollo was known as the god of leafage, the ripener, the nourisher, the grower of things, the protector of corn, the warder-off of blight and the averter of locusts. One of his oldest titles was Smintheus, which connected him either with the Asian town of Sminthe, or with mice, or with both. Here, as so often, a number of concepts merged into one cult name. Mice were associated with snakes, such as the one which, according to some versions of the story, Apollo destroyed at Delphi; they were also destroyers of the crops Apollo was believed to protect.

Many of Apollo's higher functions arose out of these primitive agricultural ones. It is easy to see the connection between his care

The laurel, *daphne* in Greek, was sacred to Apollo. He fell in love with the nymph Daphne who escaped from his amorous attentions by turning into a laurel tree, as in this painting by the brothers Pollaiuolo, 15th century: National Gallery, London

T.A.P.

The inspiration of ancient Greek painting, poetry and music, Apollo was depicted as the ideal type of young, virile beauty. Head of Apollo in the Rhodes Museum

of flocks and his skill with the bow which drove away predators. Shepherds to this day are known for their singing, playing and dancing in Greece and in other Balkan countries, and Apollo's patronage of music probably has its origin in this. The shepherd, too, must be able to care for his flocks, and Apollo was not only a healer himself, both of body and soul, and a god who kept away plagues and pests, but he was the father of the god of medicine, Asclepios.

The oriental cults which were absorbed into the worship of Apollo were as likely as not introduced into the Greek world during the period of overseas colonization which began in the 8th century BC, and from an early period Apollo took up the role of divine founder of colonies. Intending colonizers usually consulted the oracle at Delphi, and Apollo was often accorded the honorary title of 'Founder' in acknowledgement of the usually enigmatic advice his oracle had given. It was believed by some that he guided emigrants to their new settlements in the form of a sea-bird. Perhaps this is the origin of one of his more mysterious cult names – Opsophagos, 'fish-eater'.

In most of his remarkably numerous love affairs, Apollo was curiously unlucky. Deceit and disdain are the constant themes of these myths, and most of Apollo's affairs had a fatal ending.

One very unlucky love of Apollo's was Cassandra, daughter of King Priam of Troy. She resisted the god's advances strenuously, and he wooed her with gifts, including the power of prophecy. When Apollo saw that she would not yield to him, he could not, as a god, recall his gifts, but he turned his blessing into a curse by making sure that while Cassandra always foretold truly what would happen, none of her prophecies would ever be believed by those they most concerned, her own people, the Trojans.

The Ears of Midas

Although Apollo was a god of protection and patronage, he was also, like all the Greek gods, a deadly enemy on occasion. The story of Niobe, told by Homer, illustrates this side of Apollo's character. She had seven sons and seven daughters, and in an ill-fated moment, boasted that she was superior to Leto, who had only two children. At this, Apollo and Artemis drew their bows, and Apollo slew the boys, while Artemis slew the girls. Niobe in her grief wept until she was turned into a pillar of stone, from which the tears still flowed, as visitors to Mount Sipylon could see for themselves.

In another cruel legend, Marsyas the satyr challenged Apollo to a contest on the flute. Apollo agreed, on condition that whoever won might have his will with the loser. Having won by his divine skill, he flayed Marsyas alive. In another contest, this time with the god Pan, King Midas of Phrygia, who judged it, decided against Apollo. Apollo then turned Midas's ears into those of an ass, and Midas had to wear a special head-covering, so that only his barber knew about the ears. The barber had to tell someone, and he dug a hole in the ground and whispered the story into it. Rushes grew up on the spot, and still whisper about Midas's asses ears to this day.

Apollo was adopted by the Romans as a god of healing, and later as a patron of oracles and prophecy, but although his cult was developed by the Emperor Augustus, who put up a great temple to him on the Palatine Hill, the Roman Apollo was not such a vivid figure as the great Greek god.

In the early centuries of our era, a number of new religions and cults, imported from the east, were rivals for the allegiance of the people in the Greek and Roman world. From this religious struggle Christianity, of course, eventually emerged victorious. But Apollo, the god so widely respected and adored, was throughout these centuries a force still to be reckoned with. The early Christian fathers had to make a special effort to dislodge him from his place in the imagination and regard of the pagan masses they were trying to convert. It is possible that some of the later and more scurrilous stories put about concerning the god owed their inspiration to this Christian religious campaign.

DAVID PHILLIPS

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Rescuing a young man from a beautiful ghoul and saving a city from a plague demon were two of the miracles of Apollonius, a wandering sage who some pagan diehards tried to set up as a rival to Christ

APOLLONIUS

THIS APOLLONIUS (the name is not an uncommon one) was born at Tyana, a town in Cappadocia (now part of Turkey). The date of his birth is uncertain. His age at his death was probably exaggerated by his biographer. He may have been born in the time of the Emperor Tiberius (reigned 14–37 AD) or of Caligula (37–41 AD). He survived till the reign of Nerva (96–98 AD).

Almost all our information about Apollonius comes from a long, rhetorical, romantic and probably highly unreliable biography of him, written more than a hundred years after his death (it was probably begun about 215 AD) by Philostratus, a literary man whose patroness was the Empress Julia Domna, mother of the then reigning Emperor Caracalla. This pious and cultivated Syrian lady had acquired a document purporting to be the memoirs of Damis of Nineveh, a disciple and companion of Apollonius, which seems to have impressed her, and she gave this to her favourite author-in-waiting to write up.

This work of Philostratus was a brilliant literary success: he was the most elegant and accomplished Greek writer of his age. But we cannot be sure how much genuine information it gives us about the real Apollonius – possibly not very much. It does, however, give a very good idea of the literary and religious tastes and enthusiasms of the devout, educated upper-class world of the Greek-speaking East in the 3rd century AD, a period of enormous importance in the development of European religious thought.

Apollonius as portrayed by Philostratus was a wandering religious teacher and wonder-worker who travelled widely in the Roman Empire and beyond. A visit to India is recorded at length, and he is said to have met the Brahmins, whom the Greeks of the time thought of as perfect Pythagorean philosophers. Apollonius himself was a Pythagorean. The Pythagorean revival, which began in the 1st century BC, produced some quite serious philosophers, but for Apollonius Pythagoreanism meant principally vegetarianism, refusal to wear clothes made of animal fibre, condemnation of animal sacrifices, and in general a celibate and ascetic way of life.

Philostratus puts into his mouth a large number of well-composed but rather tedious discourses on this and other subjects, full of the religious and moral commonplaces of the period. He represents Apollonius as having had several encounters with kings to whom he always showed himself superior, as a sage should. The climax of these is a trial before the tyrannical Emperor Domitian (reigned 81–96 AD) which came to an abrupt end when the sage miraculously disappeared from the court.

Philostratus describes a variety of

wonderful doings of Apollonius. There is the story of how he rescued a young man from an Empusa or Lamia, a ghoul in the form of a beautiful girl who was planning to marry her victim in order to eat him, which Keats re-tells in his poem *Lamia*. Another sensational, and very primitive, story tells how Apollonius delivered the people of Ephesus from the plague by making them stone the plague demon to death; it had conveniently appeared in the theatre in the form of an old beggar, but when the heap of stones was taken away the body of a monstrous dog was found. The whole book, and especially the account of the journey to India, is full of the most fantastic marvels. It is this combination of ascetic and high-minded, if not particularly original, religious and moral teacher and spectacular wonder-worker which appealed so strongly to the Empress Julia Domna and her circle.

A Rival of Christ

There is no evidence that Philostratus or his patroness had any anti-Christian intention in producing the biography of Apollonius. But in the time of Diocletian, at the end of the 3rd and beginning of the 4th century, an attempt was made to set up Apollonius as a rival to Christ. Hierocles, a high imperial official who had a good deal to do with instigating the great persecution of the Christians under Diocletian, published in 303 AD an anti-Christian controversial work called *The Lover of Truth* which contained a comparison of Apollonius and Christ, designed to show that Apollonius was superior to Christ as a teacher and miracle-worker. The Church historian Eusebius wrote an answer to this comparison. As so often happened with anti-Christian controversial works, for obvious reasons, the answer has been preserved and the original work has disappeared. The comparison of Apollonius with Christ does not seem to have been very successful, and Apollonius never received any widespread cult among pagans. He is occasionally referred to with veneration by later pagan writers, but the Emperor Julian, the greatest and most intelligent of the 4th century defenders of the old religion against Christianity, never even mentions him.

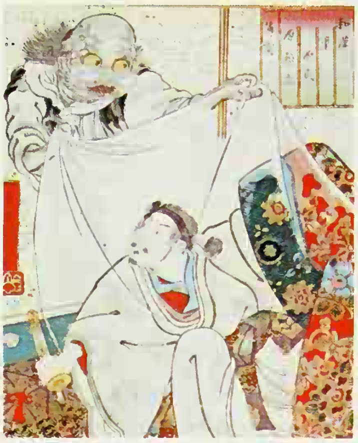
A. H. ARMSTRONG

Mansell Collection

Apotheosis

Recognition of a human being as a god: examples are the kings of Egypt, Peru, China and Japan, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and the Roman emperors, whose deification influenced the later European theory of the divine right of kings.

See KING.



Michael Holford

Apparition

Appearance of the phantom of a person, living or dead, seen in the waking state or in a dream.

See ASTRAL BODY; GHOSTS; HAUNTED HOUSES; SPONTANEOUS PSI EXPERIENCES.

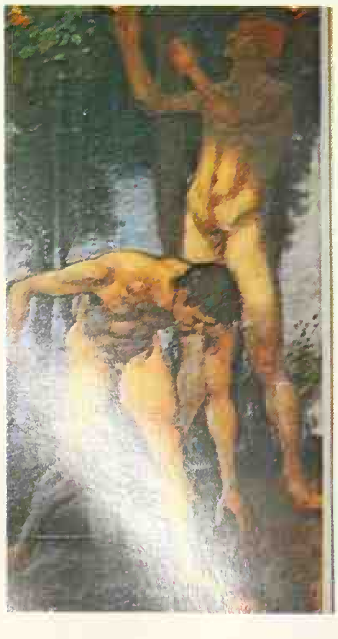
APPLE

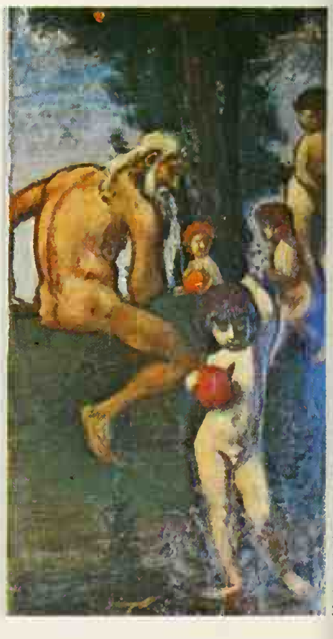
ORIGINALLY GROWING WILD in Europe and western Asia, and cultivated in Europe since Roman times, the apple is a particularly sacred tree in European mythology. A 7th century poem says that a man who puts an apple to the axe must pay a fine of one cow, and the feeling that to cut one down is unlucky has persisted to the present day. So strong was this in Ireland, that an early Irish poem, the *Triads of Ireland*, calls for the sacrifice of a living creature in payment for felling one.

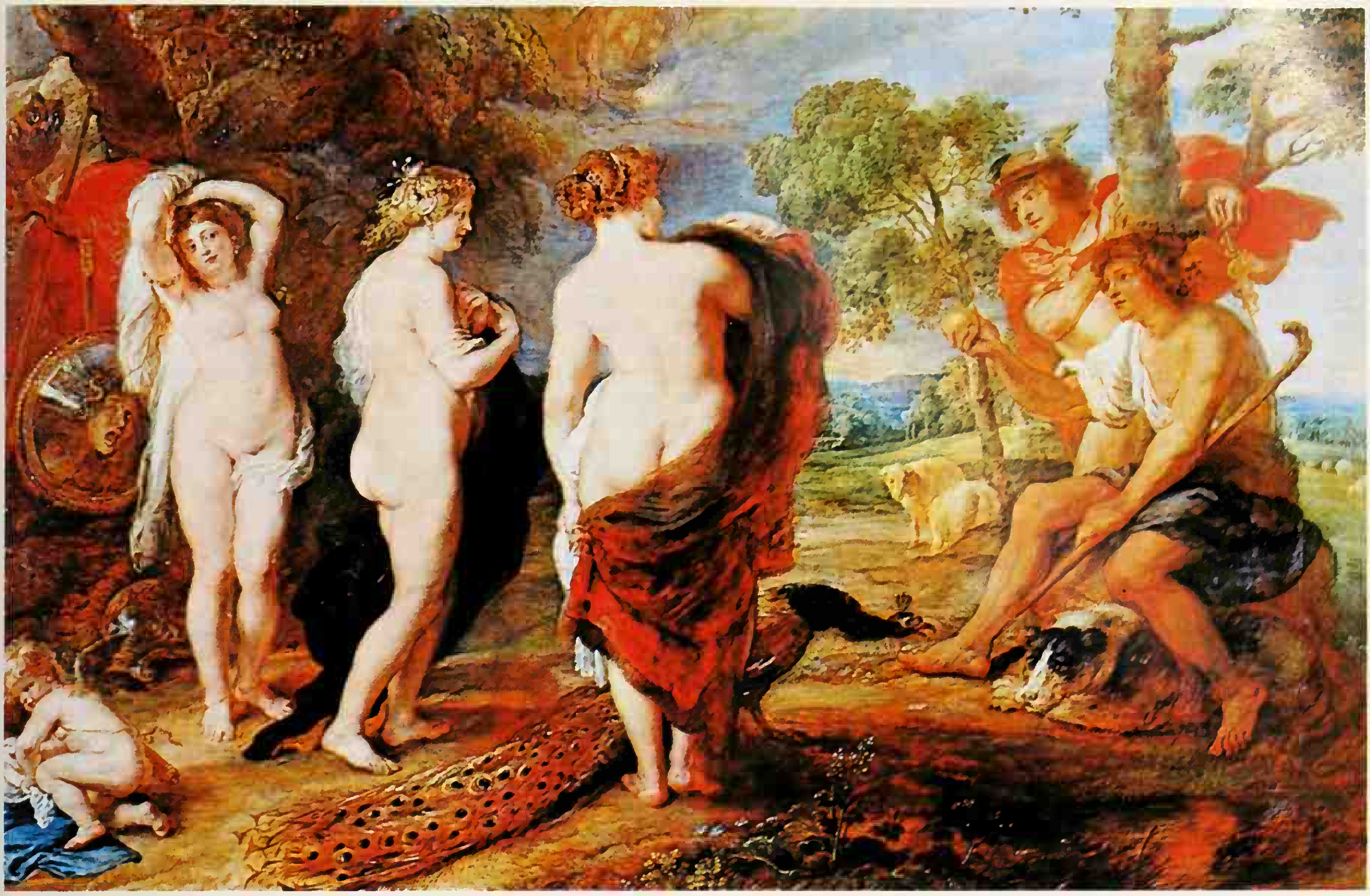
> Three unbreathing things paid for only with breathing things:
> An apple tree, a hazel bush, a sacred grove.

Felling an apple tree is unlucky because the apple stands for immortality, for eternal youth and happiness in the life after death. The Scandinavian gods kept themselves forever young by eating the golden apples of Idun, goddess of youth and spring. In Welsh legends kings and heroes go after earthly death to live happily in a paradise of apple trees called Avalon (the name possibly coming from the Welsh word for an apple, *afal*).

The apple probably owes its connection with immortality to its colours. Wild apples (crab apples) and many varieties of cultivated apple turn yellow and red as they ripen, and these are the colours of the sun – yellow in its course across the sky, red as it sinks to its 'death' at sunset, from which it rises again, resurrected and immortal, with each new morning.







The Daughters of Night

This link with the sun comes out strongly in the Greek story of the golden apples which were kept by the Hesperides or 'nymphs of the evening', the daughters of Night, in their garden in the farthest west, where the sun goes down to its death in the evening. A dragon with 100 heads guarded the apples but Hercules managed to kill the dragon and steal them. He took the apples to his master King Eurystheus, who gave them to the goddess Athene. She returned them to the Hesperides again, which makes this labour of Hercules seem singularly pointless. But it is likely that in the original story Hercules won immortality by stealing the apples.

The Apple of Desire

As an emblem of renewed life and youth, and because of its appearance when cut in half, the apple also stood for desire and belonged to love goddesses in Celtic and Greek mythology. This is its role in the story of the Judgement of Paris. A golden apple marked 'for the fairest' was thrown down at a wedding feast on Olympus, the home of the Greek gods. Three goddesses – Hera, Athene and Aphrodite – each claimed to be the most beautiful, and Zeus decided that the contest should be judged by Paris, one of the sons of the King of Troy and the handsomest man alive.

The goddesses stripped naked so that Paris could judge them properly and each of them tried to bribe him to give her the apple. Aphrodite, the goddess of desire, promised him the love of Helen, the most beautiful of mortal women. Paris gave the apple to Aphrodite, which the other goddesses bitterly resented. She kept her promise and Helen ran away with Paris; which was the immediate cause of the Trojan War.

This story, intended to account for the origin of the war, appears only in the later legends about it and has an odd ring, as it explains no religious ritual or custom and does not seem to be connected with any particular religious belief, except that the apple belongs to Aphrodite as a love goddess. It may be an elaboration of a brief reference in Homer's *Iliad* to Paris humiliating Hera and Athene at a meeting in his shepherd's hut by his preference for Aphrodite, 'who offered him the pleasures and the penalties of love'.

It has also been suggested, by Robert Graves, that the story was a mistaken attempt to explain a sacred picture showing Hermes, three naked goddesses and a young man with an apple; which really represented the Mother Goddess in her triple aspect of maiden, mother and hag (see MOTHER GODDESS), giving the apple to the sacred king to assure him of immortality; while Hermes, who led dead souls down to the underworld stood by.

Eve and the Apple

Traditionally the fruit which the serpent of Eden maliciously persuaded Adam and Eve to eat was an apple, though the Bible does not say what type of fruit was involved but only that it was the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A more likely fruit than the apple would be the fig, which would connect neatly with the clothes that Adam and Eve made for themselves from figleaves after they had eaten the fruit. But what eating the fruit brought them was the guilty consciousness of desire, which the apple symbolizes.

Aquila of Pontus in Asia Minor, who was converted first to Christianity and then to Judaism, and translated the Old Testament into Greek in the 2nd century AD, is the first writer known to have identified the fruit as an apple. He translated Song of Solomon 8.5 – 'I raised thee up under the apple tree; there thy mother brought thee forth' – as 'I raised thee up under the apple tree; *there wast thou corrupted*', evidently taking the verse as a reference to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. St Jerome, translating the Old Testament into Latin, followed suit and the belief that the forbidden fruit was an apple has been generally accepted ever since.

Above **In the story of the Judgement of Paris the apple stands for desire. Paris, one of the sons of the King of Troy, had the difficult task of judging which of three goddesses was the most beautiful. He awarded the prize, a golden apple, to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The painting by Rubens is in the National Gallery, London**

Previous page **The apple's connection with the sun is shown in the story of the apples of the Hesperides, the nymphs who lived in the west where the sun sets. From a 19th century triptych by Hans von Marées**

AQUARIUS

THE SUN ENTERS AQUARIUS, the eleventh sign of the zodiac, on 20 or 21 January, leaving on 18 or 19 February. The sign represents a man pouring out water from an urn, symbolizing for Aquarius the traditional character of helpfulness and service to others. It is now often regarded as the ideal sign to be born under. This was not always the case, though the Roman author Manilius, who wrote an astrological poem in the 1st century AD, did say that:

> The Good, the Pious and the Just are born
> When first Aquarius pours out his urn.

In modern astrological opinion Aquarius is pre-eminently the sign of the scientist, with a touch of the absent-minded professor. Aquarians are quiet, gentle, not forceful, not inclined to insist or demand their own way. They speak moderately and reasonably. They see no point in taking a tough line, for truth will out in the end, and until it does there is very little to be gained by saying anything at all.

The Amiable Aquarian

Aquarians are frequently a little shy, perhaps because they are often physically large and rather slow. But, although at times they may appear ponderous, they are not sluggish and have more humour than people think: they just do not consider it worthwhile to snatch at opportunities which will probably recur. Since Aquarius is traditionally 'ruled', or strongly influenced, by the planet Saturn, patience comes naturally to Aquarians, and less patient people may be irritated by their tolerance. They are said to be sensitive and easily moved to tears, and they dislike being criticized.

Aquarians' characteristic faults are few. The most tiresome is their inability to explain themselves, so that other people, left in uncertainty, will often put the worst construction on their actions and only the passage of time will vindicate them. This is not due to laziness, but often appears so. A similar Aquarian fault is the frequent inability to let people know that they are liked or admired. Aquarians assume this is obvious and do not realize that others like to have unmistakable signs of approval. The consequence may be that they will be considered not only lazy but cold and unfeeling, a reaction that they will think most unjust.

Two pleasing characteristics of Aquarians are that they are not impressed by pomp and pretentiousness, nor do they attempt to pass themselves off as being better than they are. They know how necessary it is to be patient, and do not expect anything else from others. It is said that they are likely to exaggerate grievances, to think that things will take a long time to improve and are worse than they really are. They have little sympathy for prejudices of race or class, and will try to understand any point of view. They are often great readers: ideas interest them and they are not at all inclined to brush them aside just because they are different from their own.

With this generally pleasing and amiable modern picture of the Aquarian can be contrasted the opinion of Vettius Valens, a Roman writing in the 2nd century AD, who described Aquarians as 'effeminate, inflexible, wicked, unfertile'. Though 'industrious and employed in public service', they were, he said, self-willed, misanthropic, atheistic and grudging.

The Age of Aquarius

In all astrological matters, it is important to understand that the traditional 'tropical' zodiac, which was first employed by the Greeks over 2000 years ago, and has been used for hundreds of years in European astrology, is out of step with the 'sidereal' zodiac, the real constellations. Traditional astrology says that the Sun is 'in' Aquarius, but if it were possible to observe the stars in daytime it would be seen that the background to the Sun is actually the preceding constellation, Capricorn. Throughout the year this displacement by one sign occurs, right round the zodiac circle. The phenomenon is due to what is known as the precession of the equinoxes.

The equinoxes are the two points in the year, in spring and autumn, when the Sun is directly above the Equator and the day and the night are of equal length, lasting 12 hours each. At the spring equinox the Sun appears to cross over from the southern hemisphere to the northern, bringing longer days and the warmth of spring and summer. At the autumn equinox, it appears to cross back again, leaving the north to the increasing darkness of winter.

The spring equinox occurs on or about 21 March, and the autumn equinox on or about 23 September. These are also the dates on which the Sun is said to enter, respectively, Aries and Libra. Some 2000 years ago this was true, and the point of the spring equinox has therefore been defined as 0° Aries, and is still so defined in all navigational calculations.

The apparent movement of the sun toward the north in summer and toward the south in winter is due, as every schoolboy knows, to the fact that the Earth's axis of rotation is inclined at an angle to the plane of its orbit. But this axis is very slowly wobbling, like a spinning top, and takes some 25,800 years to move round in a small circle. The effect of this 'precession' is to move the position of the equinox, as measured against the background of the fixed constellations, 'backward' by 1.4° every century.

The equinoxes are said to go backwards, because they move through the constellations against the direction of the planets. Since the 2nd century BC until now the Sun at the spring equinox – '0° Aries' – has actually been in the preceding constellation, Pisces, and from about 2170 it will be in the constellation Aquarius.

Precession of the equinoxes was discovered in the 2nd century BC, but few people concerned themselves about the awkward consequences of the discovery for astrology until recently. Astrologers continued to assert for a long time that the zodiac remained immutable, although it was now clear that the equinox, from which they said that the zodiac had always been measured, was an invisible moving point. That early astronomers, who had no scientific instruments, should have chosen to measure their zodiac from an invisible moving point is not a likely suggestion.

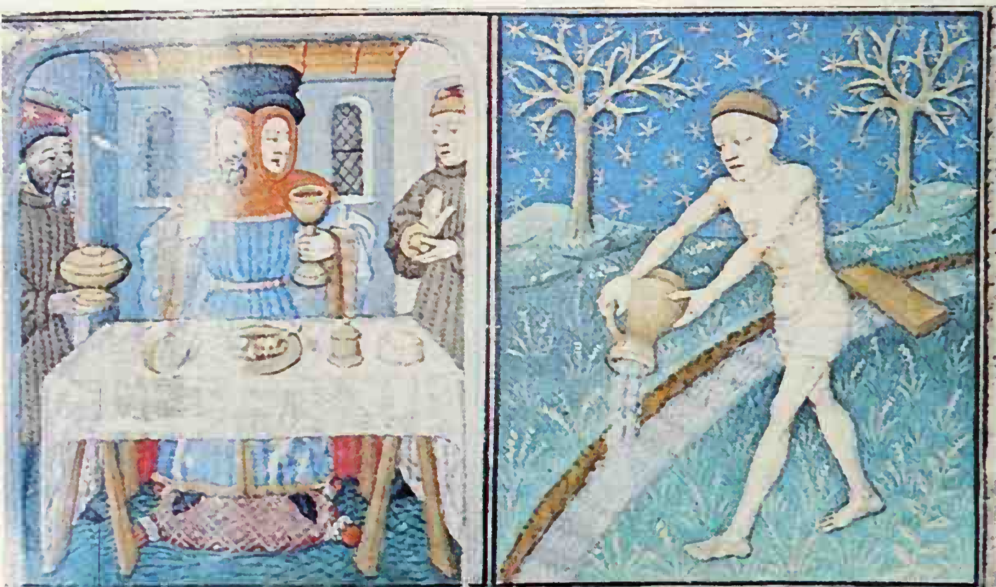
The spring equinox precessed from Aries into the constellation Pisces, the Fishes, in the 3rd century BC. The fish was a well-known symbol of the early Christians, and so it was thought that this precession foreshadowed the coming Age of Christianity. Similarly the precession of the equinox, less than two hundred years from now, into the constellation Aquarius is believed to herald the coming of an Aquarian Age of peace and harmony in a spirit of gentle moderation.

The only Aquarius into which the equinox can precess is the constellation. This must be stressed, because many astrologers are beginning to confuse the two concepts. They attach, for instance, particular importance to the Sun being 'in Aquarius' in an Aquarian Age; but the principal significance of the 'Age of Aquarius' is that the Sun, between 20 January and 19 February, will then actually be in Sagittarius.

(See also ASTROLOGY; and articles on the other zodiac signs and the planets.)

RUPERT GLEADOW*

Traditional emblem of Aquarius, the water-carrier. The two-headed figure on the left symbolizes Janus, the god of beginnings, who gave his name to January. From a French 15th-century manuscript, Bodleian Library



Bodleian Library Colour Filmstrip

ARIES

THE SUN ENTERS ARIES (see ASTROLOGY) on 20 or 21 March, and leaves that sign on 20 or 21 April. The symbol of Aries is the ram, suggesting energy, initiative, aggression, and push. It should be remembered that 'ram' can mean not only the animal but also the battering-ram, a similar instrument of aggression.

Aries owes its reputation for touchiness and dominance partly to the fact that it is the first of the zodiacal signs and partly to the many political leaders born under it – including Hitler (born with the Sun on the cusp of Aries and Taurus), Lenin and Jefferson. The sign also has a great military reputation, though in fact it has not produced as many successful military commanders as the sign of Scorpio.

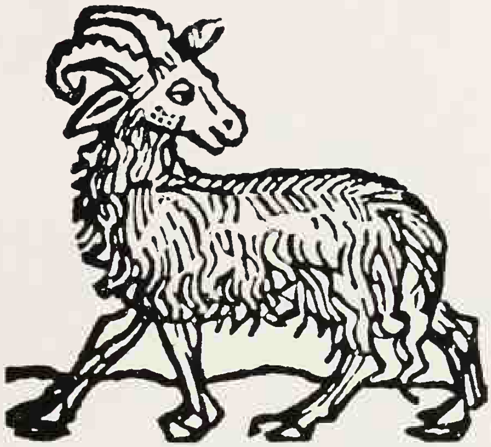
Most of the famous people born under Aries – with a few exceptions, like Brahms, Chaplin and Freud – are men who have made their mark in politics. But although most Arieans are not the single-minded political and military geniuses that the lists of famous Arieans might suggest, they do tend to think of themselves as the natural leaders in affairs. This at times results in a certain self-centredness, with an apparent assumption that other people are not quite so real or so important.

It was an Ariean, the Florentine Niccolo Machiavelli, who wrote the famous political textbook, *The Prince*, in which he advocated strong-minded and ruthless leadership of the state in the interests of the people.

The Ariean is said to be bad at early rising, but is very punctual and hates to be kept waiting. As one who inevitably should be considered the leader of any group, he or she does not like people who try to take the credit which, it seems, should naturally be his or hers. In extreme cases the Ariean can degenerate into someone who is always grabbing for credit and honours.

A typical Ariean virtue is the combative one of not taking things lying down. Arieans will assert their own point of view and can be useful leaders, for they are never afraid to make their weight felt. Compromise does not readily occur to them as the easiest way out of a difficulty; they are more likely to think that if their position is stated clearly and emphatically, other people will probably give way.

The sign of Aries the ram, from a 15th-century work on astrology by Leopold of Austria. Traditionally, those born under Aries have the natural aggressiveness of the ram



Victoria and Albert Museum

Arieans usually believe that they attained unaided the position they now hold: no one has ever perceptibly helped them. This often leads to egotism. As Arieans consider themselves number one, and the only person who matters, they attach little importance to the feelings of others. As a result, they are often not an ideal partner in marriage.

In the old days Britain, Germany and ancient Rome – all political great powers – were said to be 'under' Aries. In the days when Britain had an empire, it seemed quite natural to British astrologers that their country should be under Aries, which was thought a noble and imperialistic sign. Now that it is less easy to justify or excuse the habit of telling other people how to run their lives or their countries, it has become more difficult to speak tactfully in praise of Aries, for if oneself is number one this only implies that the rest are insignificant.

Aries is said to be the first of the signs, but this was not always the case. In the first of his *Georgics*, the Roman poet Virgil mentions 'the white bull that with his golden horns opens the year', which suggests that Taurus, the Bull, was once considered the first sign. And the Babylonians did not recognize Aries at all, its place being taken by the constellation called the Hireling, the man who works for wages.

AROMATHERAPY

THE USE OF ESSENTIAL OILS in the treatment of disease is closely allied to the employment of the raw herbs from which they can be obtained (see AYURVEDA; HERBS), and the practice was recorded at least 4000 years ago. The word – meaning treatment, not by smell, but by the use of these aromatic substances – is, however, a recent coining, attributed to the French chemist René-Maurice Gattefossé. In the course of a laboratory experiment he burnt his hand and, seeking the nearest relief, picked up a bottle of lavender oil. To his surprise the burn subsequently healed remarkably quickly. This was in 1910, but it was not until 1937, when his book on the subject was published after many years of research, that the term 'aromatherapy' was brought to public attention.

The techniques of extraction of essential oils – whether from flowers, leaves, stems, roots or bark – for use in perfumery and in medicine have always gone hand in hand. At first they were obtained by expression, resulting in a product adulterated by many unwanted substances, or by boiling with water, from which they could then be separated. A crude form of distillation was developed by the Egyptians about 2000 BC; but it was the Arab physician Avicenna who is credited with having invented true distillation in the 10th century AD. Two related methods employed by the perfumery industry are *enfleurage*, in which flower petals are laid on trays of fat to extract their perfume, and solvent extraction; but practitioners of aromatherapy believe that the inevitable adulteration affects the 'energy' of the oils, and generally use those that have been obtained by steam distillation. They also believe that the potency of the oils can vary with the time of day, month or year – or even the meteorological conditions – in which the raw materials are gathered.

The modern use of essential oils in therapeutics was developed by a Frenchman, Dr Jean Valnet, assisted by the biochemist, Marguerite Maury, who employed them in the treatment of wounds during the Second World War. The last quarter of the 20th century has seen widespread adoption of the practice of aromatherapy, not only by the proponents of 'New Age' beliefs (see NEW AGE) but even by a number of members of the medical profession.

The most usual form of application of the oils is by gentle massage (a technique first established by Mme Maury, who was principally interested in their cosmetic effects, during the 1950s), in the course of which it is believed that they are absorbed through the skin into the bloodstream; they may also be inhaled, used in the bath or, in certain cases, ingested.

The curative properties of essential oils can be attributed to a variety of causes. They certainly contain antiseptic, bactericidal or anti-inflammatory substances that are similar or identical to those used in conventional medicine. Their psychological effect is also undeniable: the pleasant aroma of most can be stimulating, producing a sense of ease in the sufferer, particularly if this is accompanied by soothing massage; and there is also evidence that they can act directly as psychological triggers, causing the brain to signal the release of natural pain-blockers such as endorphins.

The oils recommended for particular conditions are usually closely related to the herbs prescribed by herbalists in similar circumstances, and there is more than a suspicion of sympathetic magic in their selection. The aromatherapist has access to a repertoire of more than 100 essential oils, from allspice to ylang ylang; however, although a few of these may be prescribed only for specific ailments, a wide spectrum of effects is claimed for the majority. Oil of lavender, for instance, is said to be effective for skin conditions from abscesses, acne and athlete's foot, by way of earache and eczema, to psoriasis, ringworm and scabies; for lumbago, rheumatism, sprains and strains; for asthma, bronchitis, halitosis, laryngitis and whooping cough; for colic, dyspepsia, flatulence and nausea; for diseases of the genitourinary system; in cases of colds and influenza; and for depression, headaches, hypertension, insomnia, migraine, sciatica, shock and vertigo.

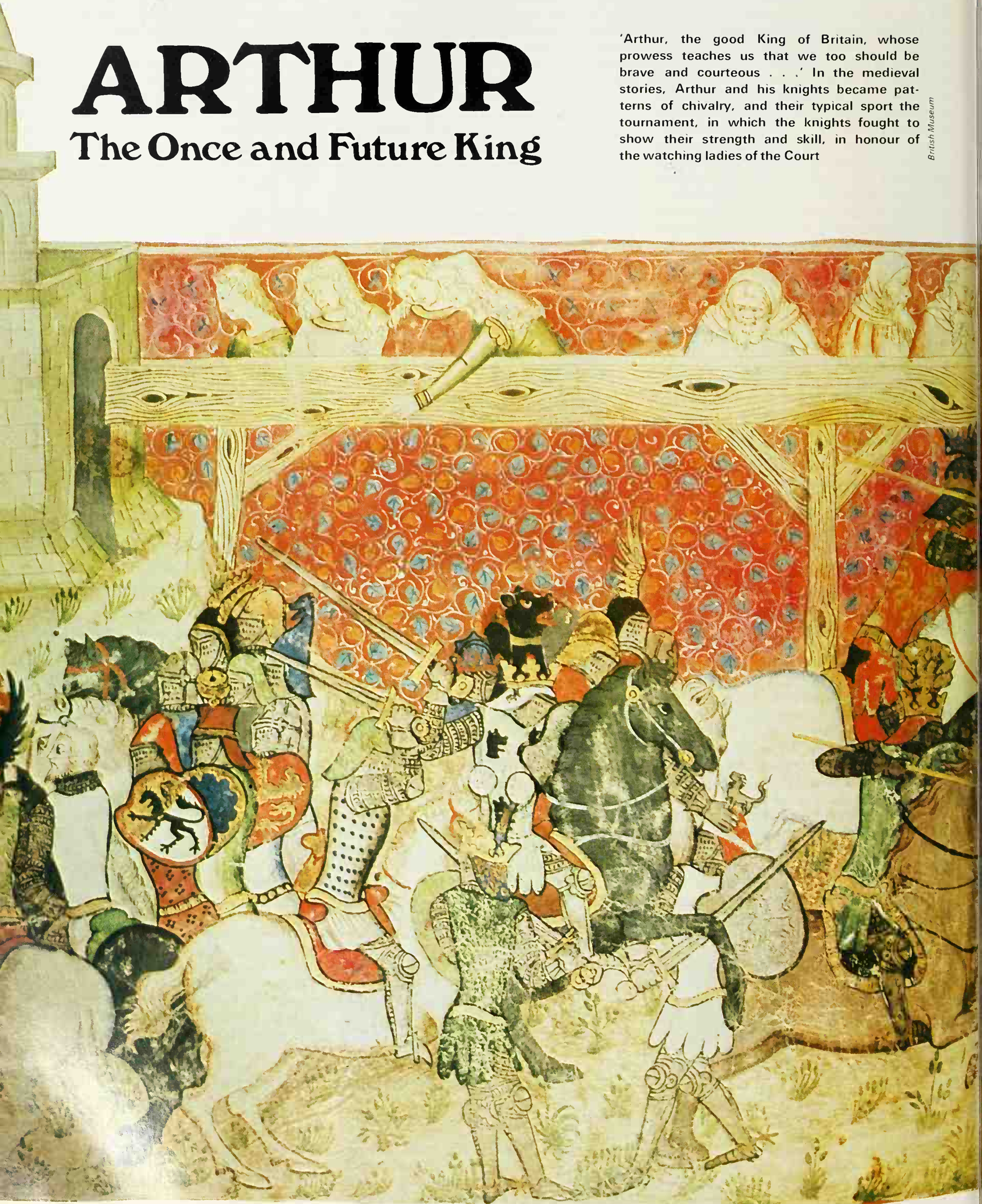
All this may be reminiscent of the travelling salesman's claims for 'snake oil', but it is true that aromatherapists have brought relief to many people and set them on the road to recovery. (See also FAITH HEALING.)

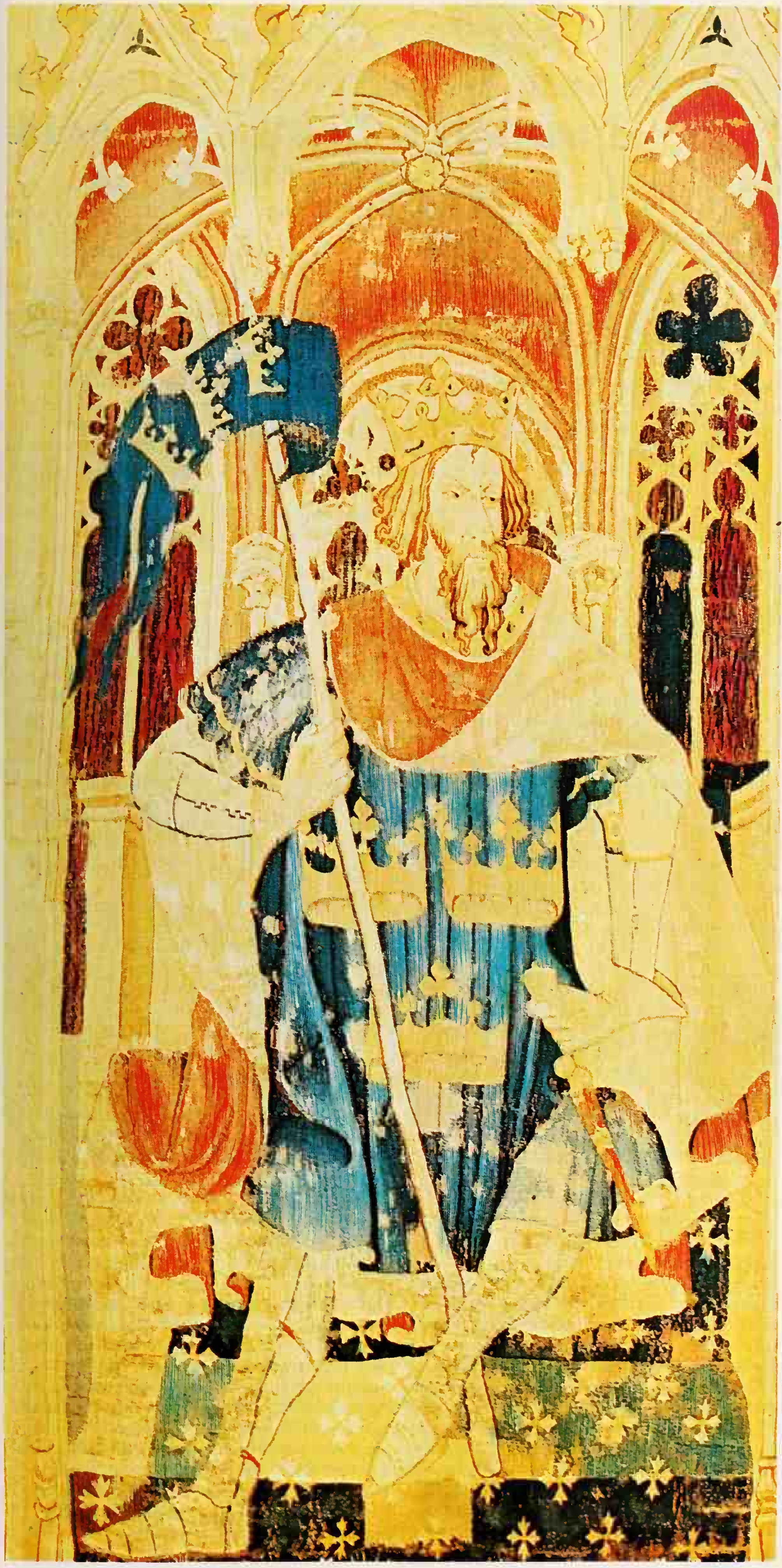
ARTHUR

The Once and Future King

'Arthur, the good King of Britain, whose prowess teaches us that we too should be brave and courteous . . .' In the medieval stories, Arthur and his knights became patterns of chivalry, and their typical sport the tournament, in which the knights fought to show their strength and skill, in honour of the watching ladies of the Court

British Museum





Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Little is known of the real Arthur – probably a British war-chief of the 6th century AD – but the stories which clustered round his memory grew into one of the most romantic, exciting and beautiful of all legends

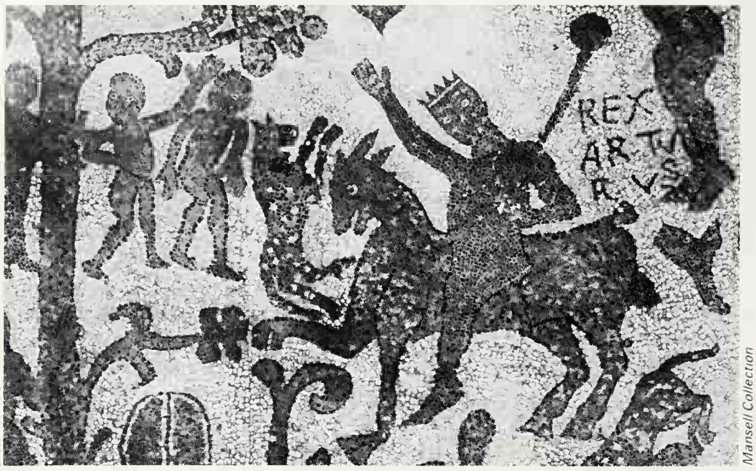
THE HERO of a famous cycle of legends and romances, Arthur was said traditionally to have been born at Tintagel in Cornwall. He became king of Britain and held court at Camelot as the leader of a band of noble warriors, the Knights of the Round Table. The knights rode out to seek adventure and great deeds, notably in the quest of the Grail – identified in Christian legend with the holy cup used by Christ at the Last Supper. Arthur was betrayed by his wife Guinevere and his nephew, or son, Mordred. Wounded in battle against Mordred, he was carried away by three fairy queens to the Isle of Avalon, the land of immortal heroes, from where he will return to lead his countrymen once more in the time of their greatest peril.

The Real Arthur

Whether there was a real man round whom the legends gathered is still disputed, but the most widely accepted opinion is that the original Arthur was a martial leader of the Romanized Britons against the Saxon warbands which invaded and plundered Britain from c 450 AD onwards, after the Roman armies had been withdrawn. If so, ironically enough, the great British hero fought against the ancestors of the majority of modern Englishmen. It has been suggested that he may have trained and commanded a force of heavy cavalry and that this was the origin of the mounted knights of the later stories.

The real Arthur may have lived about 500 AD. At about that date, according to an author named Gildas, writing some 40 years later, the Saxons were defeated in a great battle at Mount Badon. Gildas does not mention Arthur, but a *History of the Britons* compiled early in the 9th century, and attributed to a monk named Nennius, says that Arthur was the war-leader of the Britons at the battle of Mount Badon. The 10th-century *Cambrian Annals* say that Arthur beat the Saxons at Mount Badon in 516 and also mentions, in 537, 'the battle of Camlann, in which Arthur and Medraut (Mordred) fell.'

A still later story has Arthur, as the king of Britain, leading a victorious army across the Channel to conquer France. Geoffrey Ashe has pointed out that there was indeed a British ruler who took an army to France in about 470. We do not know his personal name, but his title was *Riothamus*, or 'high king', and he led an army of some 12,000 men to fight against the Visigoths. He was defeated near Chateauroux and withdrew his beaten force into Burgundy. Nothing more is heard of him but, when last mentioned, he is heading, intriguingly, for a place called Avallon. Geoffrey Ashe is of the opinion that in this Riothamus we have the original Arthur, so far as any real historical figure can be identified with the legendary hero, but many other authorities on the Arthurian legends have their doubts.



Mansell Collection

Cav. uff. U. Orlandini

Above left Part of a mosaic pavement in Otranto Cathedral, dated 1166, showing Arthur with crown and sceptre. Tales of Arthur had spread to Italy by 1100. This part of the pavement has been heavily restored, and it is not certain that Arthur was originally meant to be riding what appears to be a goat
Above right Sculpture at Modena Cathedral, c 1100, showing Arthur, Gawain and Kay rescuing Guinevere from a moated castle

The Celtic Hero

The rest of our information about Arthur comes from romantic stories which may or may not have any foundation in fact. In Celtic legend he became a great supernatural hero, boisterous and violent, who rid the land of giants, monsters and witches. He killed the Demon Cat of Lausanne, he hunted the fabulous boar Twrch Trwyth and drove him into the sea. A Welsh poem of the 10th century refers to Arthur's raid on the land of the dead, the island of Annwn. Only seven men returned alive from this expedition, whose object was to carry off the magic cauldron of Annwn, from which only the brave and the true could eat. This magic cauldron is one of the pagan forerunners of the Grail.

In the early Celtic stories Arthur has a large band of brave companions, including Cei (who became Sir Kay in the later romances), Bedwyr (Sir Bedivere), Gereint (Sir Gareth), Gwalchmai (Sir Gawain), Llenlleawc (Sir Lancelot) and Drwst Iron-Fist (probably Tristan). Arthur's wife is Gwenhwyfar (Guinevere). Some of the Celtic gods are with him, now turned into men – Manawydan, Teyrnon and Gwynn, son of Nudd, master of the otherworld.

Tales about Arthur and his exploits were popular in Wales, Cornwall and Brittany, and wandering Breton story-tellers translated them into French, embroidering and adding to them. They spread all over France and by 1100 had reached as far as Italy. One of the pastimes of the day was listening to the tales of a travelling bard, who moved on from court to castle to manor house, and lived on what he could collect from his audiences. The bards made the stories more real for their hearers by bringing the setting up to date, so that the Arthur who fought the Saxons turned into a medieval king and his troops became feudal knights.

Geoffrey of Monmouth

The first full and connected account of Arthur appeared in England, c 1135, in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*. Masquerading as history, the book has been described as 'the most successful work of fiction ever composed'. The author drew his material from earlier histories and from traditions and legends, but he seems to have drawn far more heavily on his own imagination. He traces Britain's story from the legendary first King of Britain, the Trojan Brutus, down to the days of Uther Pendragon, when the Britons were hard pressed by the Saxons. Uther Pendragon seems to be an entirely made-up character, whose name may come from a mistranslation of the Welsh phrase Arthur mab Uthr, 'Arthur the terrible', as 'Arthur son of Uther'.

According to Geoffrey's account, Uther Pendragon fell violently in love with Igerna, the beautiful wife of the Duke of Cornwall, who promptly shut her up in Tintagel Castle. The furious Uther led an army into Cornwall and appealed to Merlin, the master magician, who by enchantment made Uther look exactly like the duke. Disguised as Igerna's husband, Uther entered both Tintagel Castle and Igerna's bed, and Arthur was conceived at Tintagel.

Arthur was 15 when Uther died. Crowned king, he swiftly defeated the Saxons in a great battle in Somerset (probably intended to be the victory of Mount Badon). He went on to subdue the Scots, marry the beautiful Guinevere, conquer Ireland and most of Europe, and eventually defeat even the Roman Emperor in battle. He meant to march on Rome itself, but in Britain his nephew Mordred turned traitor and seized both the throne and Guinevere.

Arthur returned to Britain immediately and, in a final battle on the River Camel in Cornwall, the treacherous Mordred was slain. But 'the renowned King Arthur himself was wounded deadly and was borne thence unto the Isle of Avalon for the healing of his wounds...' He was succeeded by his kinsman Constantine, and Geoffrey gives the date as 542.

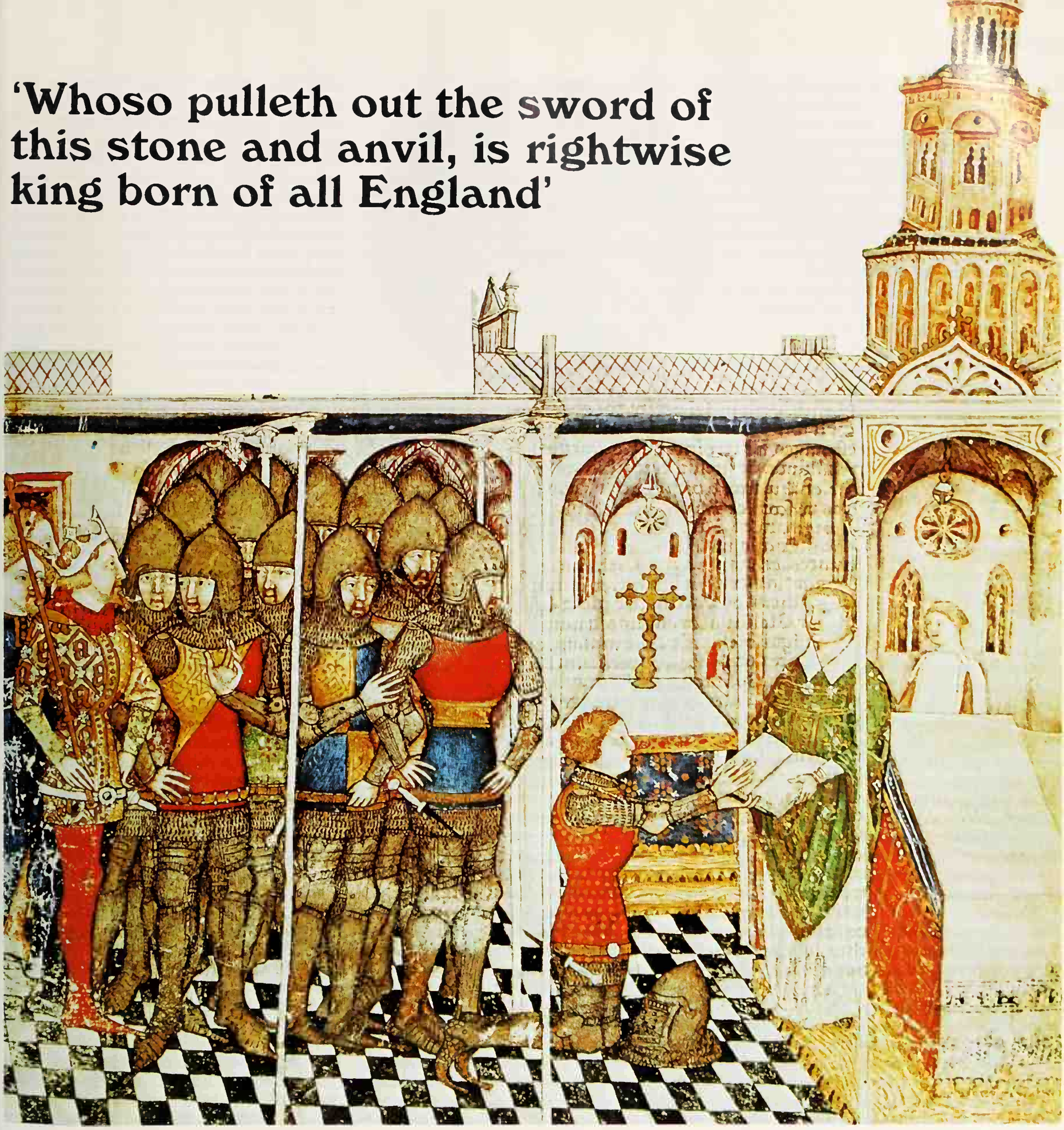
Geoffrey's *History* was accepted and followed by most subsequent historians. Even late in the 15th century, Henry VII based his claim to the English throne on his sup-

The Welsh Arthur

Said Arthur, 'Is there any of the marvels still unobtained?' Said one of the men, 'There is: the blood of the Black Witch, daughter of the White Witch, from the head of the Valley of Grief in the uplands of Hell.' Arthur set out for the North and came to where the hag's cave was. And it was the counsel of Gwyn son of Greidawl that Cacamwri and Hygwydd his brother be sent to fight with the hag. And as they came inside the cave the hag grabbed at them, and caught Hygwydd by the hair of his head and flung him to the floor beneath her. And Cacamwri seized her by the hair of her head, and dragged her to the ground off Hygwydd, but she then turned on Cacamwri and dressed them down both and disarmed them, and drove them out squealing and squalling. And Arthur was angered to see his two servants well nigh slain, and he sought to seize the cave. And then Gwyn and Gwythyr told him, 'It is neither seemly nor pleasant for us to see thee scuffling with a hag. Send Long Amren and Long Eiddil into the cave.' And they went. But if ill was the plight of the first two, the plight of those two was worse, so that God knows not one of the whole four could have stirred from the place, but for the way they were all four loaded on Llamrei, Arthur's mare. And then Arthur seized the entrance to the cave, and from the entrance he took aim at the hag with Carwennan his knife, and struck her across the middle until she was as two tubs. And Cadw of Prydein took the witch's blood and kept it with him.

Culhwch and Olwen (trans. G. & T. Jones)

'Whoso pulleth out the sword of this stone and anvil, is rightwise king born of all England'



Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

Arthur's knights, renowned for their chivalry and courage, constantly set out in search of adventure and to perform deeds of valour. The supreme quest was that of the Holy Grail. The Knights Swear the Quest for the Grail, from the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

posed descent from Arthur. The book was a great popular success and in 1155 Robert Wace translated it from Latin into French, in a version which makes the first surviving reference to the Round Table. By 1200 an English cleric named Layamon had turned the history into English, adding to it the story that, after the final battle against Mordred, the fairy queen Morgan took Arthur away in a boat to Avalon. He also said that Arthur had the Round Table specially built to avoid disputes over precedence among his knights. Meanwhile in France, another writer, Chrétien de Troyes, had turned his attention to 'the Matter of Britain'.

The poems of the Frenchman Chrétien de Troyes had an even greater influence on the later legends of Arthur than the prose of the British Geoffrey of Monmouth. It was Chrétien who firmly established Arthur's court as the centre of a company of gallant knights and beautiful women, engaged in both dangerous adventures and amorous intrigues. Very little is known about his life, but in the 1160s – about 30 years after Geoffrey had written his *History* – Chrétien was living at the court of the Countess of Champagne in Troyes. He based his poems, or said he did, on earlier written texts which have not survived and on the tales of travelling bards.

In Geoffrey of Monmouth, Arthur is the central figure and hero; in Chrétien and the later French legends, Arthur recedes into the background. Chrétien's poems are about the adventures of the individual knights of King Arthur's court: Gawain, Yvain, Erec, Lancelot and Perceval. Geoffrey, as an Englishman, was pleased to imagine Arthur conquering most of western Europe, which of course included France; Chrétien and other Frenchmen could imagine no such thing, and their Arthur is not a great conqueror. Geoffrey placed Arthur and his court in real surroundings; in the French legends, although a few names of real places are used, Arthur and his knights live in a country that never was, a timeless fairyland beyond reality. Geoffrey never mentions the Grail; Chrétien began a poem about the Grail but did not live to finish it. Geoffrey has comparatively little to offer in the way of marvels and magic; Chrétien and his successors have far more. This element of the supernatural probably came to French writers from the travelling story-tellers, and originally from the Celtic sources.

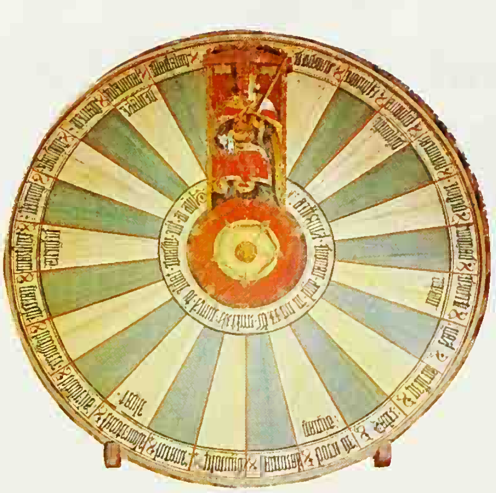
Chrétien portrayed Arthur's court in a way which suited his own surroundings and his own ideals. He was heavily influenced by the code of chivalry which affected the polite society of courts and castles in France in his time. His descriptions of the way in which Arthur's knights behaved are object-lessons in the proper conduct befitting chivalrous gentlemen. As he says at the beginning of his *Yvain*, 'Arthur, the good King of Britain, whose prowess teaches us that we too should be brave and courteous... '

The Contest of the Hawk

The opening scenes of Chrétien's first Arthurian poem, *Erec et Enide*, set the tone of bravery and courtesy. The hero Erec rides off from Arthur's court at Cardigan to chastise a stranger knight who has insulted one of Queen Guinevere's ladies-in-waiting. He follows the knight, whose name eventually turns out to be Yder (for some reason Chrétien hated to reveal the names of his characters until the last possible moment) to a town where he meets a surpassingly beautiful girl named Enide. 'Nature herself had marvelled more than five hundred times how upon this one occasion she had succeeded in creating such a perfect thing.'

Erec discovers that next day there is to be a contest, in which Yder the stranger knight is expected to be the victor, 'for in the presence of all the people there will be set upon a silver perch a sparrow-hawk of five or six moultings – the best you can imagine. Whoever wishes to gain the hawk must have a mistress who is fair, prudent and courteous. And if there be a knight so bold as to wish to defend the worth and the name of the fairest in his eyes, he will cause his mistress to step forward and lift the hawk from the perch, if no one dares to interfere.'

Next day, the prize is claimed for his lady by Yder, of whom everyone else is terrified, but Erec challenges him and demands the hawk for the lovely Enide. The crowd quickly clears a space and the two knights fight a long-drawn duel – 'they reach for each other with the tips of their lances' as they charge together on horseback, 'and strike each other so hard that the shields are pierced and broken; the lances split and crack... ' The two knights fight on until they are both exhausted and bleeding. Both are ashamed to be striking such faint blows and they agree to rest. Yder says, 'Let us withdraw and rest a little; for too weak are these blows we deal. We must deal better blows than these; for now it draws near evening. It is shameful and highly discreditable that this battle should last so long... Surely we should do our best with blades of steel for the sake of our lady-loves.'



An oak table in Winchester Castle, once believed to be the original Round Table. Henry VIII showed it proudly to royal visitors. It has the Tudor rose in the middle because the Tudors based their claim to the English throne partly on their supposed descent from Arthur

Michael Holford

Presently the combat is renewed. Erec hacks through Yder's armour into his shoulder and then deals him such a tremendous blow upon the helmet that it quite stuns him. Erec drags off the fallen Yder's helmet to kill him but to do so would be a breach of the code of chivalry, as Yder is quick to point out. 'Mercy now, and do not kill me after having overcome me and taken me prisoner: that would never bring thee praise or glory.' Erec relents and orders Yder to go to Arthur's court and surrender himself to Guinevere.

The story emphasizes the chivalrous virtues of courage, strength and skill in fighting, showing mercy to a defeated foe, keeping one's word, refusing to tolerate an insult to a woman. The contest of the hawk is a typical institution of chivalry which occurs again and again in different forms in the later Arthurian stories – a romantic beauty contest which automatically leads to violent knightly combat, but a combat which is supposed to be fought in a fair and sporting spirit. Not that Chrétien and his successors were unduly starry-eyed about their heroes. The knights have the defects of their qualities. They can be reckless, haughty, stubborn and, in the heat of battle or rage, savage and bloodthirsty. They feel fear and do not always manage to overcome it. Their sexual morals are often decidedly loose (and did not appeal to Victorian critics). A knight worsted in combat may willingly admire the prowess of his opponent, or he may simply sulk.

The Knightly Quest

Quests are the principal feature of Chrétien's stories and of the later romances. A knight rides out to seek adventure and to preserve, or re-establish, his honour and reputation as a ferocious but courteous fighting man. During the quest he does battle against enemy knights, who may be chivalrous warriors like himself or evil, crafty and treacherous oppressors of the poor and weak. He rescues beautiful women from wicked knights and wizards. He is often captured and escapes death or dishonour by a hair's breadth at the last moment. He encounters savage beasts and monsters, glamorous seducers and witches, enchanted castles and spellbound forests.

The extent to which Arthur himself has shrunk in stature in Chrétien is shown in his *Lancelot*. The court is at Camelot. A stranger knight appears before the king and announces that he holds prisoner many knights and ladies of Arthur's household. But he has no intention of returning them to Arthur's court. 'Rather do I wish to proclaim and serve thee notice that thou hast not the strength or the resources to enable thee to secure them again.' Geoffrey's Arthur would have replied to this insult by leading an army to rescue the captives. Chrétien's Arthur merely replies meekly that 'he must needs endure what he has not the power to change.'

In the same poem Chrétien tells the story of the love affair between Lancelot and Guinevere, in which Arthur is cuckolded, and which became a stock feature of the later legends.

Chrétien's successors also added details which became accepted episodes of the legends. Robert de Borron's *Merlin*, written soon after 1200, follows Geoffrey of Monmouth's story of Arthur's conception and birth, and adds that he was brought up by Kay's father and won the crown of Britain by drawing a sword from a stone. The *Mort Artu* (Death of Arthur) brings in the disappearance of Arthur's sword Excalibur into a magic lake when Arthur is carried away to Avalon.

From the 13th century onwards the stories of the Round Table continued to be told, with additions and alterations, to generations of audiences. The stories had the same appeal as the popular romantic literature of our own day, for which they largely created the pattern, with many of the same ingredients: heroes and villains considerably larger than life, sex and violence, feats of strength and last-minute escapes, misunderstandings and mistaken identities, the thwarting of evil designs and the triumph of courage and honour.

The Legend in Full Flower

In the 15th century the Arthurian legend reached its finest expression in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* (written in English despite its French title). The book is a reworking of much of the earlier Arthurian and Grail material and, although there are inconsistencies and confusions because so many different tales are combined together, the result glows with the charm and splendour of Malory's style.

In Malory's book, Arthur was the son of Uther Pendragon and Igraine of Cornwall, conceived at Tintagel after Merlin had magically transformed Uther into the likeness of Igraine's husband. Ignorant of his true parentage, Arthur was brought up by Sir Ector, the father of Kay. When Uther died, there was no one to succeed him and various great barons struggled for the throne. Eventually, at Merlin's instigation, the Archbishop of Canterbury summoned all the barons to London, where Merlin had

The Passing of Arthur

Then Sir Bedivere departed and went to the sword, and lightly took it up, and went to the water side; and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and then he threw the sword as far into the water as he might; and there came an arm and an hand above the water and met it, and caught it, and so shook it thrice and brandished, and then vanished away the hand with the sword in the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the king, and told him what he saw. Alas, said the king, help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried over long. Then Sir Bedivere took the king upon his back, and so went with him to that water side. And when they were at the water side, even fast by the bank hoved a little barge with many fair ladies on it, and among them all was a queen, and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur. Now put me into the barge, said the king. And so he did softly; and there received him three queens with great mourning; and so they set them down, and in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head. And then that queen said: Ah, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? Alas, this wound on your head hath caught over-much cold.

And so then they rowed from land, and Sir Bedivere beheld all those ladies go from him. Then Sir Bedivere cried: Ah my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies? Comfort thyself, said the king, and do as well as thou mayst, for in me is no trust for to trust in; for I will into the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound: and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul.

Sir Thomas Malory
Le Morte D'Arthur

provided 'a great stone four square, like unto a marble stone; and in midst thereof was like an anvil of steel a foot on high, and therein stuck a fair sword naked by the point, and letters there were written in gold about the sword that said thus: Whoso pulleth out the sword of this stone and anvil, is rightwise king born of all England.'

No one succeeded in pulling out the sword, though many tried, until the young Arthur came by and casually took it to give to his foster-brother Kay. When this was discovered, Arthur was crowned king and defeated all rivals in a series of battles.

Not realizing that she was his own half-sister, Arthur made love to King Lot's wife when she came to the court, and she gave birth to the traitor Mordred, who was thus both the son and nephew of Arthur. It was this unwitting incest which brought Arthur and the Round Table to destruction, as Merlin prophesied. 'But ye have done a thing late that God is displeased with you, for ye have lain by your sister, and on her ye have gotten a child that shall destroy you and all the knights of your realm.'

Merlin and Arthur went to a lake, from the middle of which an arm protruded holding a sword. The sword, Excalibur, belonged to the Lady of the Lake, who gave it to Arthur. Later, when Arthur married Guinevere, his father-in-law gave him the Round Table as a wedding present. It seated 150 knights.

In the later books, Arthur recedes into the background, as in the French legends. The bulk of the *Morte D'Arthur* is concerned with the chivalrous quests of the knights: Lancelot, Gawain, Gareth, Galahad, Uwaine (Chrétien's Yvain), Perceval, Tristram of Lyonesse (Tristan) and many more. The story of Lancelot's love for Guinevere is told, and the adventures of the knights who go in search of the Grail.

Malory's tales are full of supernatural marvels and beings – giants, goblins, fairies, invisible warriors, wizards and enchanters. Arthur was enticed into the Forest Perilous in North Wales by a great sorceress, but was rescued by his knights and thereupon cut off the witch's head. Sir Bors came to a castle of beautiful women but, when he crossed himself, the castle and the ladies vanished and 'he heard a great noise and a great cry, as though all the fiends of hell had been about him.'

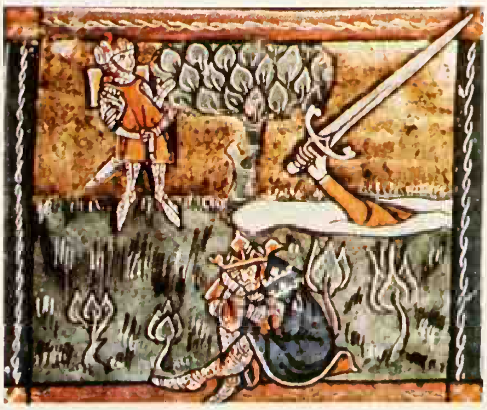
The Road to Avalon

In the last book of the *Morte D'Arthur* Arthur himself emerges again as the central figure. When he realizes that Lancelot and Guinevere were in love, he refuses to admit it to himself or anyone else, because of his affection for Lancelot.

But Mordred and Agravaine, who hated Lancelot, insisted on accusing him to the king's face, in spite of the opposition of Gawain and Gareth, who saw that it would mean the end of the fellowship of the Round Table. Their misgivings were justified, for when the accusation of adultery and treason was made in public Arthur gave Mordred and Agravaine leave to seize Lancelot. Lancelot escaped them, killing Agravaine, and fled to France. Some of the knights went with him, others remained loyal to Arthur, and, when Arthur and Gawain took an army to France against Lancelot, good knights were killed on both sides, Gawain himself dying of wounds received in combat with Lancelot.

Mordred, left behind to rule England, seized the crown and tried also to seize Guinevere but she resisted him. Arthur returned to England and in a great battle sought out Mordred and killed him with a spear thrust, but the dying Mordred struck Arthur a terrible blow with his sword. Sir Bedivere helped Arthur away to the waterside and, on Arthur's instructions, threw the sword Excalibur far out into the water; an arm came up from the water and caught it and vanished away again. Then the wounded king was taken into a fairy barge and carried away to Avalon, the land of immortal heroes.

When Arthur lay dying, Sir Bedivere took the sword Excalibur and threw it into the water, from which a hand rose and caught it. Early 14th-century manuscript



British Museum

This last, magnificently written scene is set in Glastonbury. There was a tradition that Glastonbury was the Isle of Avalon, and much of the area round Glastonbury was water-logged and marshy. Long before, in 1191, the monks of Glastonbury had unearthed an oak coffin from 16 feet underground, which they claimed to be Arthur's. They showed an inscription, 'Here lies buried the renowned King Arthur with Guinevere his second wife in the Isle of Avalon', on a lead cross which they said had been found inside the coffin. Malory says that it was still a popular belief that Arthur would return again one day, and it was said that on his tomb was written *Hic jacet Arthurus rex quondam rexque futurus*, 'Here lies Arthur, the once and future king.'

The story of Arthur has attracted many writers and artists since Malory, including Spenser, Tennyson, the Pre-Raphaelites, Masefield and T.H.White. Whether Arthur was originally a sacred king has been hotly disputed. An old Welsh poem says that he had three wives, all named Guinevere, which might suggest that he was regarded as a sacred king married to the Triple Goddess. Mordred's attempt to seize both the throne and Guinevere suggests the combat between the sacred king and his rival and attempted successor, who tries to oust him as consort of the Goddess. The evidence is inadequate to prove the theory but it may be that this ancient theme, lying beneath the surface of the legend, has helped to give it a deep and timeless appeal.

RICHARD CAVENDISH

(For the Grail legends, see GRAIL: and see also CAMELOT; GALAHAD; GAWAIN; LANCELOT; MERLIN; MORGAN LE FAY; PARSIFAL; TRISTAN.)

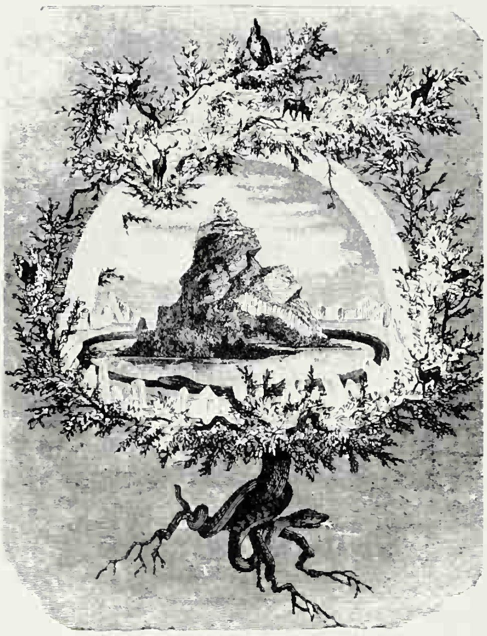
FURTHER READING: Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* is available in a Penguin edition; there is also a Penguin edition of Geoffrey of Monmouth and an up-to-date Everyman edition of Chrétien de Troyes. See also G. Ashe, *Mythology of the British Isles* (Methuen, London, 1990); R. Cavendish, *King Arthur and the Grail* (Taplinger, New York, 1979); N.J.Lacy ed, *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* (Boydell Press, 1986).

ASH

VARIOUS GREEK MYTHS link the birth of mankind with a universal ash tree. Hesiod's fable of Zeus creating a race of brazen men from ash accounts for the reference in Homer, when Penelope says to Ulysses, 'Tell me thy family from whence thou art; for thou art not sprung from the olden tree...'

Nordic myths also suggest that man was created from the wood of the ash by the god Odin; and the word itself derives from the Norse *aska*, meaning 'man'. In the *Edda* the ash becomes the World Tree, Yggdrasill. Its branches overspread the world and reached the heavens, while its roots penetrated the abyss of Hel, from which our modern word 'hell' is derived. Halfway up the trunk was Midgard, the disc-shaped earth, surrounded by ocean, with the serpent of eternity and a final mountain boundary on its outer rim. Asgard, the mountain of the gods at the base of Valhalla, reared up immediately around the trunk.

The association of the ash and snakes is widespread. In the 1st century AD Pliny wrote on ash's magical efficacy against snakes, how snakes would rather perish in a fire than crawl over an ash twig, and that they even avoid the shade cast by an ash tree; regarding which the 16th-century writer Gerard remarks: 'It is a wonderful courtesie in nature, that the Ash should floure before the serpents appeare, and not cast his leaves before they be gon againe.' To carry an ash twig or wear ash leaves in your hat would protect you against being bitten by snakes; if you were, drinking ash sap would cure the bite. An ash stick was guaranteed to kill a snake outright.



Yggdrasill, the world tree in Nordic myth, was an ash tree: its roots reached to hell and its uppermost branches touched heaven. It was also believed that the disc-shaped earth was situated halfway up the trunk.

Witches were also repelled by the ash, a bunch of ash keys being considered particularly useful against them. Ash sap was fed to newborn babies to protect them from evil spirits, and a baby's first bath should be before a fire of ash wood. A bunch of ash leaves would guard a bed and its occupant; a house within an ash grove was secure from supernatural influences.

The Irish burnt ash to keep the Devil away, and it was the original Yule log, the burning faggot from which the old year's sacred flame was transmitted to the new. Ash is in fact a splendid wood for fires, burning even if green.

There are many minor bits of magic connected with this tree. It could be employed to cure warts by pressing a pin into the wart and then into the tree saying:

Ash tree, ash tree
Pray buy these warts off me.

Children could be cured of rupture by passing them naked through a cleft, made in an ash tree and held open by oaken wedges, which was then closed and bandaged. If the tree's wound healed satisfactorily, the rupture would do likewise. Gilbert White describes the rite in *The Natural History of Selborne*, where he also notes the even odder custom of the 'shrew-ash'. Shrews were believed to cause cramp and lameness if they ran over cattle. If a live shrew was sealed into a hole bored in an ash, the cattle could be cured by stroking them with a branch from this tree. Ash could in any case not injure animals, and was one of the trees recommended for making shepherds' crooks.

'Good morning to you, God, good morning.' The Supreme Being of the Ashanti is everywhere and sees everything; if you have something to say to him, you say it to the wind

ASHANTI

THE ASHANTI PEOPLE live in Ghana, in West Africa. Religious rites and ceremonies are important in traditional Ashanti society because it is believed that men interact, not only with each other, but also with their ancestors and with supernatural beings and spirits which inhabit the universe. This interaction is possible because man himself is made of material and non-material elements. He has a body formed out of the blood of his mother, a spirit derived partly from his father and a soul given to him by the Supreme Being.

To the Ashanti, therefore, man's well-being depends on both physical and spiritual factors. When a person is sick, the cause of his illness may be spiritual as well as physical. When his affairs do not go right, he may have been thwarted, not only by his fellow men but by supernatural forces and spirits invoked by evil men, or by spirits and beings which he has offended.

Although the Ashanti believe in a hereafter, they are more concerned with the here-and-now. They do not hold the view that the fruits of man's toils and labours are reaped only after death. You do good in order to live a full life on earth. If a person does not fare well, he must do something about it. If he still does not succeed he can only hope to have his destiny changed in the other world before he returns to be born anew, if he so wishes.

The Dependable God

To the Ashanti the universe is the work of a Creator, Odomankoma. It is he who created the heaven and the earth, men and all creatures of the earth, trees and rivers. As they say on their drums, things that owe their origin to the Creator must be clearly distinguished from the works of man who draws on Nature for his own benefit. The things of Nature are from long ago.

The path has crossed the river,
The river has crossed the path
Which is the elder?
We made the path and found the river.
The river is from long ago
From the Creator of the universe.

When Odomankoma the Creator created the world, he also created life and death. According to an Ashanti myth, Death became so powerful that he was able to kill the Creator himself. But when the Creator died, the universe continued to be controlled by a Supreme Being, called Nyame. At first this Supreme Being lived very close to earth and was within easy reach of man, but he was obliged to move far out into the heavens because women hit the earth continually as they pounded grain in mortars.

From his abode on high Nyame is able to see everything, for he sees even with his eyes turned away. He seems to be everywhere, for the Ashanti say, 'If you have something to say to the Supreme Being, say it to the wind'. He is the giver of rain and sunshine who controls the seasons. He offers protection and help to those who need it. As summarized in Ashanti proverbs: 'It is the Supreme Being that brushes off flies from the tailless animal'; 'it is the Supreme Being that pounds food for the one who has lost his arm.'

Man's destiny is in his hands: 'If the Supreme Being does not want you to die and a human being tries to kill you, you will not die.' Men can depend on him, for he is someone on whom one leans and does not fall. The drummer exhorts his listeners:

The Dependable God bids us all
Abide by his injunctions.
Then shall we get whatever we want,
Be it white or red.
It is God, Creator of the firmament.
Good morning to you, God, good morning.
I am learning, let me succeed.

It is not only human beings who owe their lives to the Creator. The Ashanti believe that the supernatural beings which inhabit the universe also owe their existence and power to him. Of these beings, those who wield the greatest power are the gods (*abosom*), who may be identified with particular features of Nature. They include river

Camera Press London

The Ashanti believed that, at the birth of their nation, a golden stool descended from the heavens. The stool has always been a powerful symbol, and an insurrection resulted when the British tried to take possession of it in 1900

gods, tree gods and mountain gods, as well as gods without any clearly defined habitat. All of them rank below the Supreme Being and are sometimes described as his children. However, within the limits of their powers, they act independently.

Gods Born of Woman

Gods may be given a temporary home in a special shrine, consisting of a brass pan and effigies or other objects to which sacrifices can be made. This makes it possible for gods identified with particular places to be worshipped wherever a shrine can be made for them; provided, of course, that they are served by priests appointed by them, or by priests familiar with their mode of worship.

Various human characteristics are attributed to the gods. They have sex, some being male, some being female and a few being both. They tend to specialize, to be more effective in some spheres than in others. There are gods of war and gods of victory. There are gods of peace and gods who are consulted about the causes of epidemics or other calamities.

The Ashanti believe that a god can enter into a woman's womb and be born into the world. Usually he does not come forth in the form of a human being but as a piece of stone, which is subsequently discovered to be a god. The gods can change their shapes, turning themselves into animals or birds when it suits them, or appearing in human form – in the guise of beautiful women or people who are insane. The gods also have unlimited mobility. They can stay in and out of their shrines as they like. The fact that shrines are made for some of them in different localities suggests that their worshippers believe that the gods can be present in many places at the same time.

Ashanti religious practice allows freedom of movement and freedom of worship. Every god is available for consultation by anyone who needs help, and people travel to the particular gods who can give them the kind of help they need. Sometimes the gods themselves direct those who come to them to other gods. Naturally some gods become more renowned than others and attract people to their shrines from all over Ashanti, and indeed from other places.

The Earth Spirit

As well as the gods, the Ashanti recognize the existence of Nature spirits, which find a permanent or temporary home in natural objects and may be beneficial to those who recognize them and harmful to those who ignore them. They are generally not the objects of organized cults. They have no priests, no set form of worship, even though they may occasionally be the focus of rituals.

The most important Nature spirit recognized by the Ashanti is the spirit of the Earth. This is a feminine spirit, for the Earth is like a mother to humanity. The attitude of the Ashanti to this spirit is expressed in drink-offerings and in the poetry of drums. The priest of a god acknowledges the Supreme Being and the spirit of the Earth before he starts the trance dance. In the poetry of drums, the drummer addresses the spirit of Earth, saying:

> Earth, when I am in life, I depend on you.
> When I am about to die, I depend on you.
> Earth that receives the body of the dead,
> Good morning to you Earth; good morning,
> great one....

Apart from the Earth, no planets are recognized by the Ashanti as belonging to the world of spirits. Neither the sun nor the moon appears in prayers or rituals.

Dangers of the Forest

Other Nature spirits are associated with particular trees, especially those used for carving or building. These trees are not the objects of organized cults because they are not personified gods (and so are distinguished from tree gods proper). When an Ashanti wishes to cut down any of them for use, he performs a little ritual so that the spirit enshrined in it may not harm him.

There is a widespread belief that many spirits inhabit the forest and that it is dangerous for anyone to venture alone into the thick forest unless he knows the lore of the forest. And it is not only Nature spirits that loiter there. Gods may also be met and some of those who become priests discover their gods through being possessed while in the forest. When they are possessed elsewhere, there is a tendency for them to run into the bush, to live there in seclusion so that they will be in constant touch with the god who has possessed them.

The rites performed during festivals set aside for some gods include bringing the god from the bush in a procession to the town.

The Living and the Dead

The position of man's soul and spirit in the universe of spirits is also of concern to the Ashanti. While on earth, man must keep his own soul pure and strong. He must also respond to the spiritual influences and powers around him, because he has no power of his own to determine the course of his own life. Although he has a spirit, it does not make him a member of the world of spirits. It is when he dies that he can join the world of spirits, and in this state he shares such attributes of the gods as unlimited mobility, shape-changing, the power to show himself visibly through some human being and the gift of invisible presence.

Because the dead have supernatural powers beyond the reach of living men, it is believed that they can be of help to the living when they are reached through prayers and ritual. The Ashanti pray to the dead in much the same way as they spoke to them while they were alive. They offer them food and drink, conscious of their human past. They slaughter a sheep for them and afterwards cut it up and share it, as it were, with them.

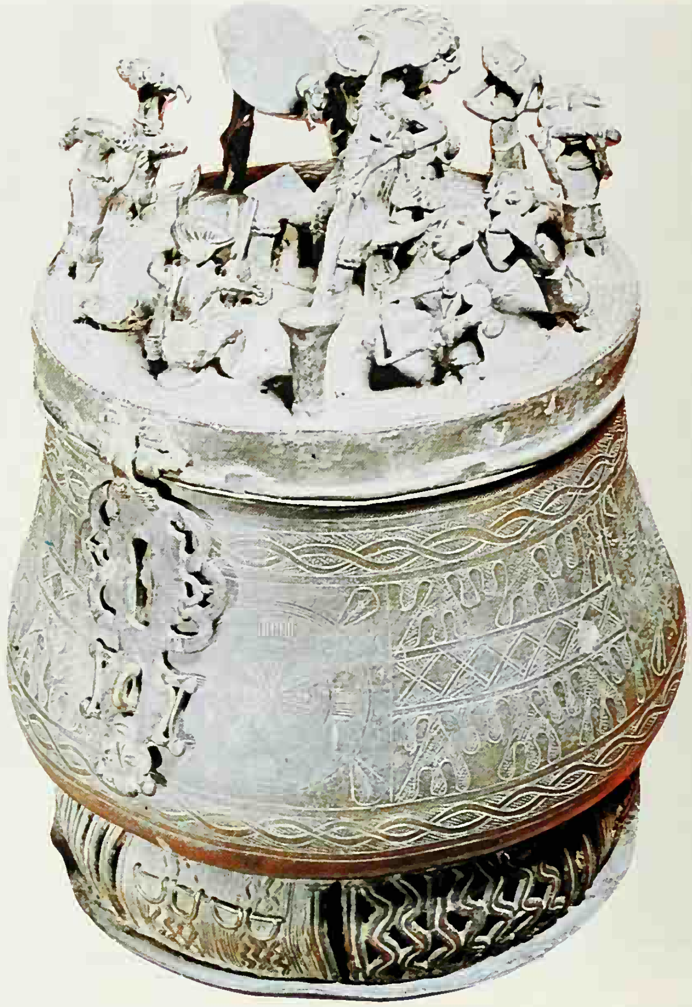
Though the Ashanti revere the dead and behave in their presence in a religious manner, they think of them not as gods but as persons in another world, as kinsmen who are no longer visible but who can help the living.

Magical Force

The Ashanti believe in the magico-religious power of witches and sorcerers and in the protective powers of charms and amulets, prepared by experts, and worn on the body or hung in a room. There are amulets believed to provide protection against being shot, or assaulted, charms against witchcraft and bad medicine. These provide additional security to that offered by the gods and may be prepared or prescribed by a priest for the use of a client.

Related to the belief in magico-religious power is the belief that there is vital force inherent in some material things. This belief shows itself in the choice of ritual materials – in the selection of herbs, liquids, and substances assumed to have spiritual power. Such materials are used to harness spirits, to act as a vehicle of communication with the unseen, and to act as agents of a person's desires.

Charms, amulets or other preparations of vital force can be used to influence not only gods and spirits but also man – to influence his mind or his heart, to weaken his body or destroy him completely. They are important bridges to the supernatural and may operate in the worship of supernatural beings as well as in magic designed to achieve its ends without the direct intervention of a supernatural being.



Ancestor worship is an important element in Ashanti religion. Funerary urn of an ancestor: because the dead have supernatural powers, they can help or harm the living. They are prayed to, and offered food and drink

When they form part of the rituals of worship, they may be combined with actions and speech (in ritual formulae and prayers) or music and movement. When they are exploited for magical purposes, they may be combined with spells or incantations and prescribed actions.

The Axe of Nyame

Although there is evidence in the past of temples and priests of Nyame, a distinctive organized cult of the Supreme Being has not survived. There are no set rituals for Nyame, no set occasions for worship exclusive to him. The central place which he occupied in Ashanti religious thought has continued to be expressed through the symbol of *nyamedua*. This is a forked branch of a tree (*Alstonia congensis*) named after Nyame the Supreme Being, which is fixed outside houses to serve as an altar for him. A pot containing a neolithic axe is placed on this altar. The axe is called *Nyame akuma*, the axe of Nyame, for it is believed to come down from the heavens during thunderstorms. Offerings to the Supreme Being are placed in the pot.

It is the lesser gods and the ancestors who receive the greatest attention in Ashanti religious practice, for they are worshipped at fairly regular intervals. But there is a vast difference in the forms of worship devoted to the ancestors and those set aside for the gods.

The ancestors have no priests trained specially for the purpose of worship or the performance of rituals, for the ancestors are guardian spirits that may be approached by any of their kinsmen. In the case of ancestor chiefs, those who officiate on ritual occasions are the chief and his elders, the members of the tribe who are the keepers of the royal mausoleum and a selected number of officials and servants of the court.

The worship of the gods, on the other hand, requires trained priests. All those who assume this role undergo long periods of training, generally lasting not less than three years, during which they learn the music and dance of the gods, the particular songs of the gods they serve, the elements of drama embodied in public worship, the rites of the cult, methods of divination and healing, the use of herbs, the preparation of charms and amulets or how to counteract their powers, and methods of dealing with the personal problems of their clients.

Worship is regarded not just as an expression of faith in the unseen but as a service which gods and spirits demand. The traditional religion of the Ashanti shows greater concern with lesser beings and spirits than with the Supreme Being himself because it is believed that they are both more capricious and more directly involved in everyday life. (See also CULT OF THE DEAD.)

J. H. KWABENA NKETIA

R. K. Singh

Indian child, during a festival of Shiva, covered in ashes believed to contain holy and curative properties; the god was often represented as a white or silver-coloured man

Ashes have been used to promote fertility, to give strength or to bring rain, to protect against hailstones or thunder: ashes of burned Bibles have been recommended for treating potato disease

ASHES

ASHES ARE the residue of fire, and just as fire is regarded in mythology and folklore as something which purifies and also regenerates, or brings new life, so much the same properties are associated with ashes. Some primitive peoples have regarded ashes as the 'seeds' of fire, falling from it as it dies in the same way that the seeds do from a dying plant, and so apparently containing the life of the fire itself.

The ancient Jews sacrificed a red heifer by fire, the ashes being used to purify the unclean. The ancient Egyptians burned red-haired men, not so much as a purificatory rite but so that their ashes could be scattered on the crop fields to quicken the seed in the earth.

At the root of the custom of burning living creatures in sacred fires, to fertilize the soil with their ashes, lies the conviction that ash is the soul of fire and so brings renewal. It was long a folk custom in Europe for the ashes of the Midsummer fires to be spread on the crops or fed to farm animals (see FIRE; MIDSUMMER EVE). Even in parts of modern Germany a flaming Easter wheel is still rolled down the hillside, its ashes being used to spread on the fields.

Ashes have also played their part in the rites of rainmakers and in control of the weather. South American tribes, particularly the Muyscas of Colombia, throw ashes into the sky to condense the clouds and induce rain, or scatter ashes on water as a charm to produce fair weather. In Central Europe ashes were spread on the fields as a protection against hailstones, and in France as a defence against lightning.

Sometimes linked with the idea of ashes as renewers of life is the belief that when a creature has been burned, its ashes contain its qualities in concentrated form. In Martin Luther's *Martyr's Hymn*, the ashes of the Christian martyrs are the seeds of faith:

> Flung to the heedless winds
> Or on the waters cast,
> The martyr's ashes watched
> Shall gathered be at last.
> And from that scattered dust
> Shall spring a plenteous seed
> Of witnesses for God.

Scrabbling for the Ashes

To ensure that the power of a witch was utterly extinguished, it was necessary that her body should be burned and that her ashes should be scattered to the winds. After the burning of Urbain Grandier at Loudun in 1634, his ashes were shovelled by the executioner towards each of the four points of the compass, while the mob scrabbled among the dead embers of the pyre for charred bones, which would serve as aphrodisiacs or as cures for constipation. (See LOUDUN NUNS.)

In New Guinea it was long believed that the qualities associated with one living creature could be magically transferred to another by a ritual involving ashes. A snake would be killed and its ashes smeared on the legs as a defence against snake-bite. Even today certain South American tribes mix the ashes of their loved ones with their food and drink in order to absorb the qualities of the dead.

An interesting combination of the agricultural use of ashes with the belief that the ashes of something holy contain magical power came to light in 1857 at the trial of the Cornish well-sinker Thomas Pooley. Charged with the scandalous blasphemy of recommending the virtues of the ashes of burned Bibles as a fertilizer and for the treatment of potato disease, he was condemned by an unsympathetic bench of magistrates to 21 months' imprisonment in Bodmin Gaol – where he shortly afterwards went mad.

Ashes were often used in divination, one of the strangest examples being the custom in Yorkshire where, on the eve of St Mark's day (24 April), the ashes were riddled in the hearth and left overnight, and in the morning carefully examined for any mark resembling a footprint. Should this be found, the member of the family whose foot fitted the print was believed to be doomed to

Right **Ashes, like fire which creates them, are widely believed to carry new life and strength, as among the Nuba people of the southern Sudan, whose wrestlers cover themselves with ashes for extra vigour**
Below **Victorious Nuba wrestlers are awarded branches which are burnt; the wrestlers cover themselves with these ashes in preparation for the next fight**

die within twelve months.

In Ireland, in the Isle of Man and Lancashire, divination by ashes was carried out at Hallowe'en, when a curious love ritual was sometimes performed by single men. The bachelor would sprinkle ashes or seeds along some quiet lane and then wait and watch. The first girl to pass along that way after him was destined, it was said, to become his wife.

An entirely different way of looking at ashes is to be found among medieval alchemists, who regarded them as the dead body of a substance. If a piece of wood, for instance, was burnt, the smoke rising up was the 'soul' of the wood and the ashes left behind were its corpse.

A similar connection between ashes and death lies behind their widespread use as a badge of sorrow, bereavement and repentance. The wearing of sackcloth and ashes as a sign of grief is referred to in Matthew 11.21. In Roman Catholic churches on Ash Wednesday, the ashes of the palms used to decorate the church on Palm Sunday the previous year are used to mark the brows, or sprinkled on the heads, of penitents.

Leni Riefenstahl

ASMODEUS

THIS DEMON OF LUST was probably originally the Persian 'fiend of the wounding spear', Aeshma Daeva, from a root *aesh*, meaning 'to rush forward' or 'violent movement'. He was a storm spirit and a personification of rage, who filled men's hearts with anger and desire for revenge. Anger was regarded in the ancient world as something pre-eminently evil, stirred up like the violence of thunder and lightning by powerful supernatural forces.

Imported from Persia into Palestine, Asmodeus or Ashmedai appears frequently n Jewish literature, where his original function was to cause frustration in marriage, probably in order to provoke rage and violence. In the book of Tobit, written c 250 BC, Tobias marries Sarah, who has had seven husbands before but all of them have been strangled by Asmodeus to prevent hem from lying with her. On the advice of he angel Raphael, Tobias burns the heart and liver of a fish, and the smoke drives the demon away. No explanation of the effectiveness of the fish-smoke is given, though it was evidently an unusually fierce and voracious fish as it had earlier jumped at Tobias and attempted to devour him while he was washing himself in the river Tigris.

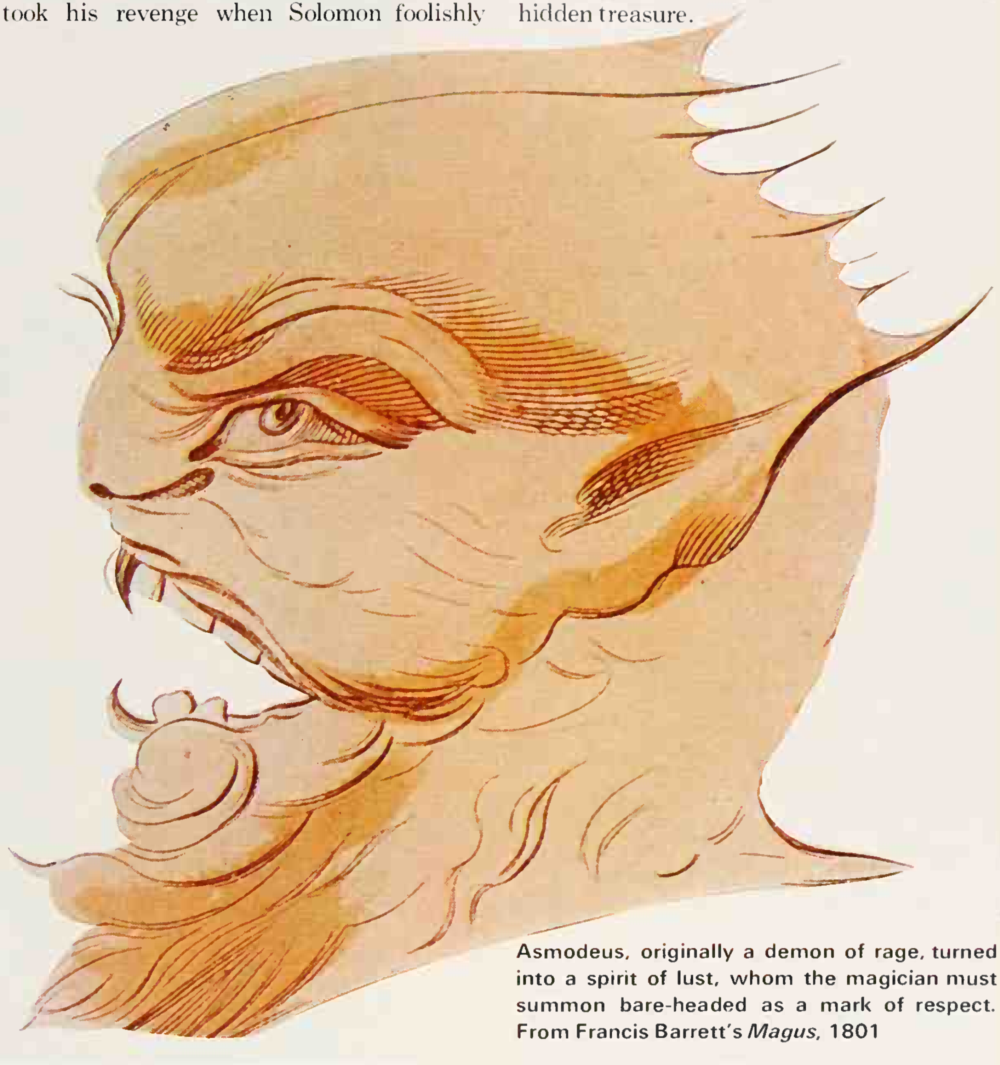
The Latin version of Tobit adds that Tobias and Sarah also defeated the demon by remaining chaste for the first three nights of their marriage, which was the foundation of the later custom of the 'Tobias nights'. Down to the 19th century in parts of France, Germany and the Balkans, it was the cusom to follow the example of Tobias and Sarah. In medieval France husbands someimes paid a fee to the Church for a licence o disregard the rule.

According to Jewish stories, Asmodeus was the son of a mortal woman, Naamah, either by one of the fallen angels or by Adam before the creation of Eve. In the *Testament of Solomon*, written between 100 and 400 AD, he says, 'I was born of angel's seed by a daughter of man.' Described as 'furious and shouting', he not only prevents intercourse between husband and wife but also encourages adultery. 'My business', he says, 'is o plot against the newly married, so that hey may not know one another . . . I transport men into fits of madness and desire when they have wives of their own, so that they leave them and go off by night and day to others that belong to other men with the result that they commit sin . . .'

In this way the demon's functions extended from frustrating desire to arousing it. He developed into a supernatural power of lechery and was said to have the feet of a cock, a bird noted for indiscriminate sexual vigour.

According to other Jewish tales, Asmodeus was the king of demons and lived on a mountain top. He liked to go up to heaven every day to take part in learned discussions there. The master magician King Solomon forced Asmodeus and the other devils to build the Temple at Jerusalem but Asmodeus took his revenge when Solomon foolishly allowed him to seize the magic ring in which his power resided. Asmodeus promptly hurled the ring down to the bottom of the sea, sent Solomon into exile and reigned in his place. But Solomon miraculously recovered the ring from the belly of a fish and imprisoned Asmodeus and the other demons in a large jar.

A magical textbook called the *Lemegeton*, which gives a long list of demons, says that when Asmodeus shows himself to human eyes he rides a dragon, carries a spear and has three heads – of a ram, a bull and a man, all traditionally lecherous creatures. The magician must summon him bare-headed as a mark of respect. He can make the magician invisible and lead him to hidden treasure.



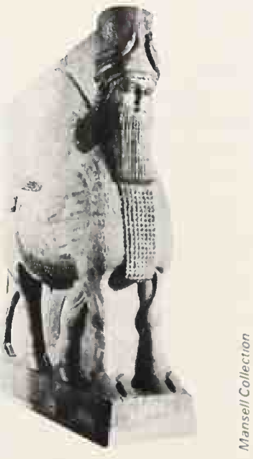
Michael Holford

Asmodeus, originally a demon of rage, turned into a spirit of lust, whom the magician must summon bare-headed as a mark of respect. From Francis Barrett's *Magus*, 1801

Jean Ribière

Ass

Often a symbol of stupidity, and sometimes of lust; in Christian symbolism it stands for humble patience and courage: some classical writers accused the Jews and the early Christians of worshipping an ass.



Mansell Collection

Assyria

Empire in northern Mesopotamia, which reached its peak of dominance in the Middle East in the 8th and 7th centuries BC; named from its chief town and god, Ashur. See MESOPOTAMIA.

This Queen of Heaven, with crescent horns, was a rival of the God of the Jews, noted for the sensuality of her worship

ASTARTE

A GREAT MOTHER GODDESS was worshipped under various names throughout the Middle East, as Ishtar in Mesopotamia, as Ashtart or Asherah by the Phoenicians and Canaanites. The Greeks called her Astarte and equated her with their own love goddess Aphrodite, who was originally one of her many forms (see APHRODITE). Numerous clay plaques representing her have been found in Syria and Palestine, dating from 1700 to 1100 BC and probably worn as charms to promote fertility. She is mentioned frequently and with violent disapproval in the Old Testament and eventually, like many other deities who were rivals of the God of Jews and Christians, she turned into a demon and is one of the fallen angels in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

> . . . Astoreth, whom the Phoenicians called
> Astarte,
> Queen of Heaven, with crescent horns;
> To whose bright image nightly by the moon,
> Sidonian virgins paid their vows and songs.

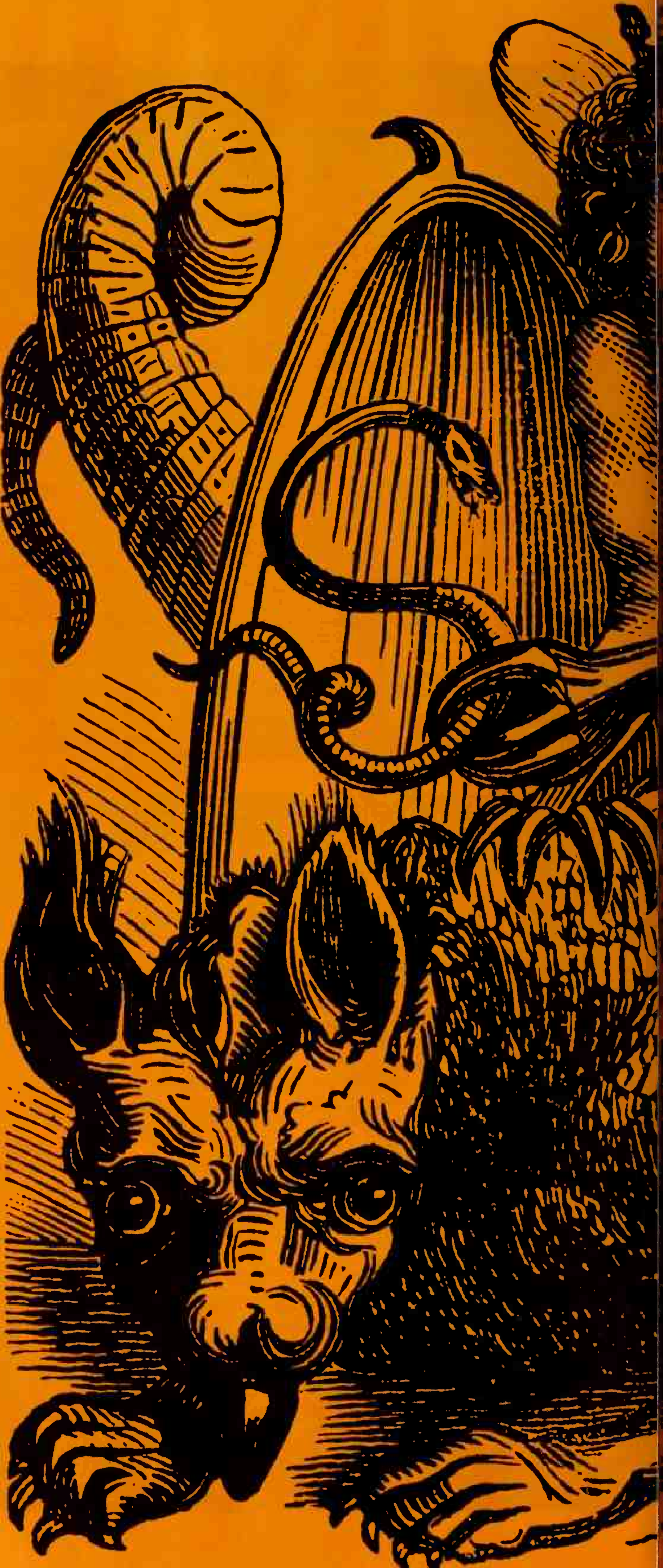
W. F. Albright has remarked that, 'Goddesses of fertility play a much greater role among the Canaanites than they do among any other ancient people': evidently because of their dread of drought and famine. Though these goddesses had different names and were independent personalities, they had similar functions and were essentially the same goddess. They ruled war as well as fertility, motherhood and sex, and they were frequently represented naked and with the sexual organs emphasized.

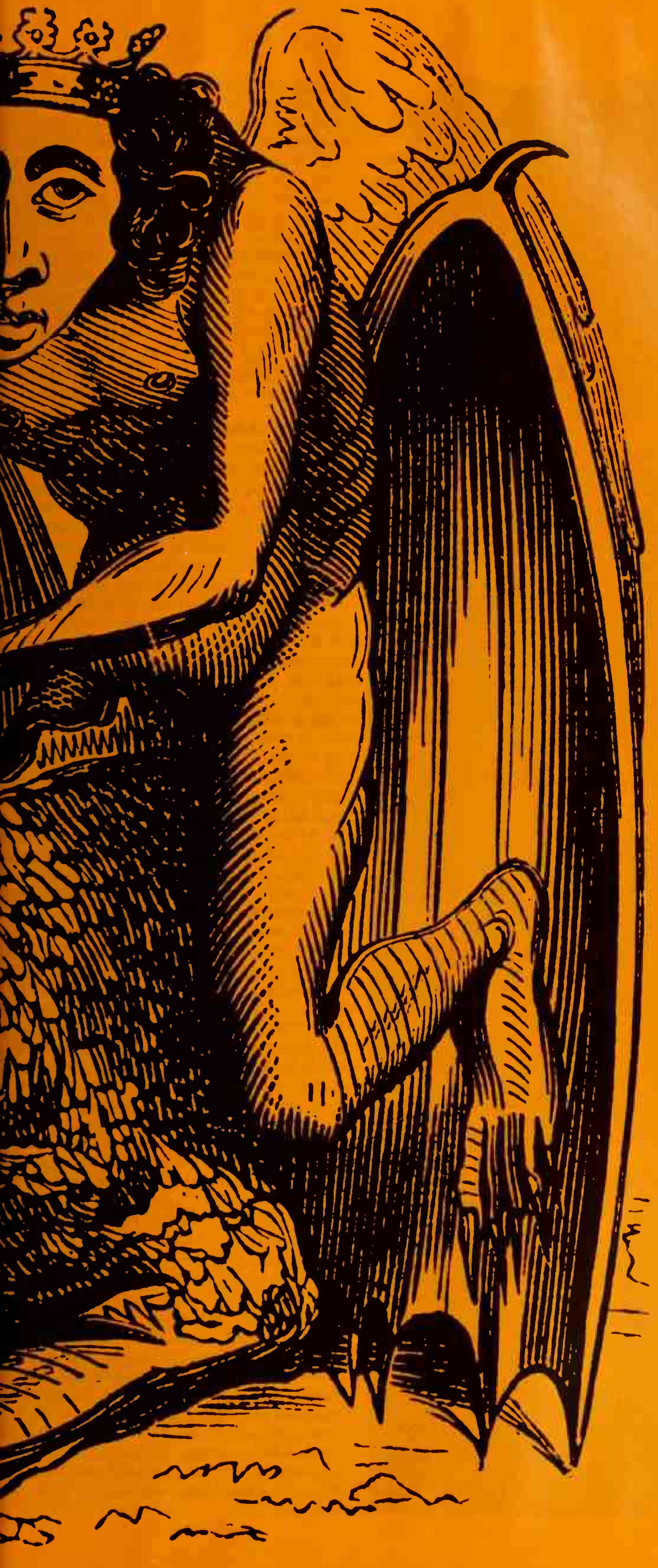
The Bride of Heaven

Ashtart was the chief goddess of the Phoenicians at Tyre and Sidon, and wherever they established colonies they took her with them. She had a temple in their colony at Memphis in Egypt, for instance, and temples at Carthage. A Phoenician statuette of her in alabaster has been found at Galera, near Granada in Spain: she sits on a throne, flanked by sphinxes and with a bowl under her breasts. At some point in her ritual milk was poured into the head of the statuette and flowed into the bowl through holes pierced in the goddess's breasts.

Asherah or Asherat, often called Asherat of the Sea, was the wife of the Canaanite supreme god El, whose name means simply 'the god', and by him was the mother of 70 deities. The same goddess was also worshipped in the south of Arabia and by the Amorites, the Semitic nomads who by 2000 BC had spread northwards from Arabia into Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia. There is an Amorite inscription to her of the 18th century BC, in which she is called 'the bride of heaven'.

In the Ugaritic texts, dating from c 1400 BC, found at Ras Shamra in northern Syria since 1929, the goddess Anat plays a leading role. The chief god El stays in the back-





ground and the most active god is Baal, the storm god who sends the rains which bring fertility to the earth. Anat is his sister and wife, and she plays the vital part in killing the god of drought and sterility or, in other words, in reviving the life of Nature (see BAAL).

Asherah, the wife of the old supreme god El and the mother of Baal, seems to have been hostile to Baal at first but later joined forces with Anat to help him. Apparently, the followers of both goddesses tried to attach them to the fertility god as the cult of Baal developed.

All these goddesses were imported into Egypt and in the 13th century BC Pharaoh Rameses II called himself 'the companion of Anat'. Ashtart or Asherah appears in an Egyptian sculpture where she is called Qodshu or Qedeshat, 'the sacred prostitute'. She is naked, stands on a lion, and holds a lotus flower, a symbol of life, in her right hand. In her left hand the goddess holds a pair of serpents, which are symbols of life renewed because snakes slough their old skins each year.

In Canaan the symbol of Asherah was a wooden pole, called an *asherah*. It might be a living tree but was more often a tree-trunk with the branches lopped off, standing in a socket on a stone base. The upright pole is again a symbol of life, generation and fertilizing power, and may be the 'tree of life' which appears frequently in Canaanite art.

The Abomination of the Sidonians

When the Israelites invaded Palestine they found numerous local fertility gods and goddesses established, Baals and Ashtarts or Asherahs. The Old Testament writers called the goddess Ashtoreth, combining her name with the Hebrew word for 'shame', *bosheth*, as a comment on the licentiousness of her rites. But many Jews worshipped her. '. . . They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were round about them, and bowed down to them.' When Gideon pulled down his father's altar of Baal and cut down the asherah which stood beside it, 'he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, and he did it by night.' (Judges, chapters 2 and 6).

It was natural to feel that the gods already established in the country were powerful there, and the worship of a fertility goddess appealed to Jewish farmers who were just as concerned for the increase of their herds, crops and families as the Canaanites were. In spite of the efforts of the prophets, many Jews continued to worship the mother. In the 10th century BC King Solomon built a 'high place' or sanctuary 'on the right hand of the mountain of corruption . . . for Ashtoreth, the abomination of the Sidonians' (2 Kings, chapter 23).

In the 9th century at Mizpeh, north of Jerusalem, temples of Yahweh and Asherah

The great Semitic goddess Astarte eventually turned into the male demon Astaroth, who was said to have very bad breath. From Collin de Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal*, 1863

stood side by side. King Ahab and his wife, the notorious Jezebel, were devoted to the Canaanite gods and maintained 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. It was against these priests that Elijah fought his great ritual battle on Mount Carmel (1 Kings, chapter 18). He succeeded in calling down fire from heaven when they could not, but the reaction against him was so strong that he fled for his life.

In the late 7th century BC the prophet Jeremiah still bewailed that 'the children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven' but those he reproached answered that they would continue to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour libations to her, as they and their fathers had done, because attempts to suppress her worship had brought nothing but disaster (Jeremiah, chapters 7 and 44).

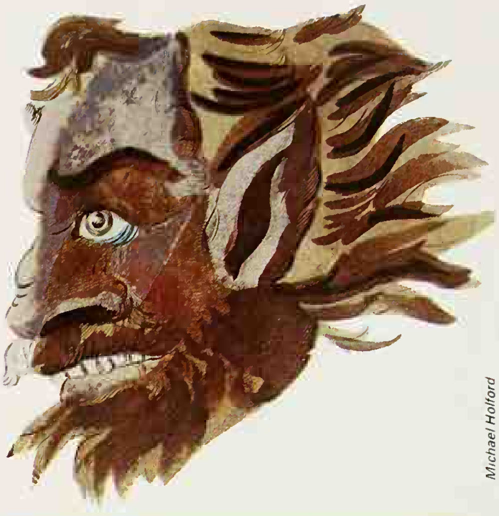
Priests and Prostitutes

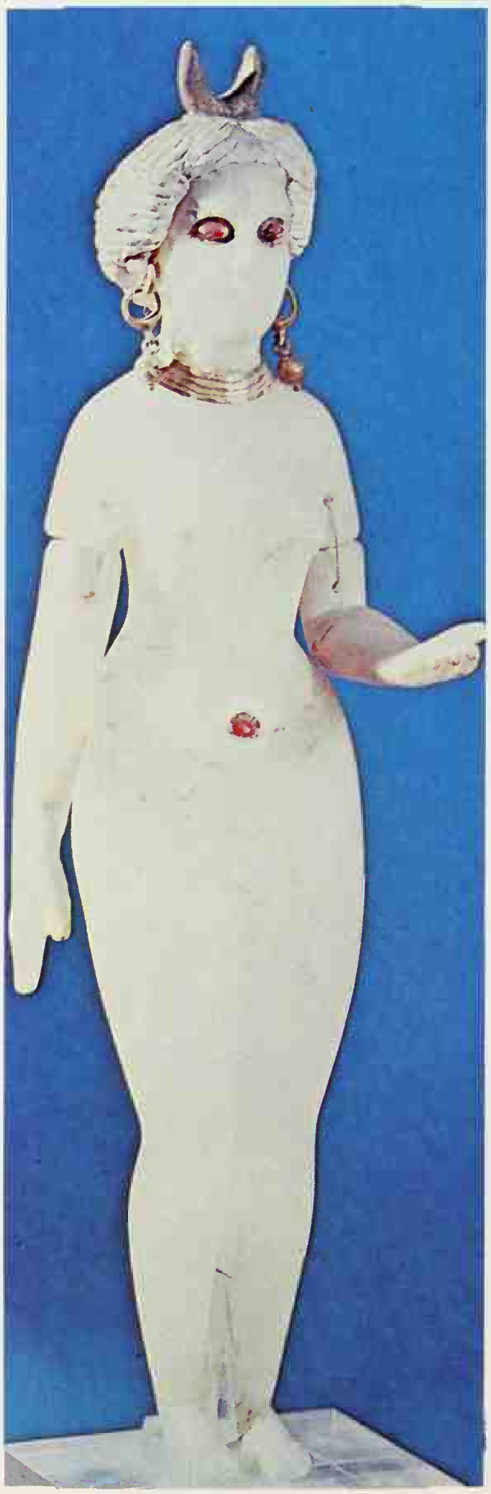
As goddess of fertility, Astarte typified the reproductive powers of Nature and woman. She was associated with the moon, and often shown with the horns of the crescent moon, because the moon was believed to govern the growth, decay and rebirth of all things as it waxed and waned in the sky (see MOON). The dove, an amorous bird, belonged to her and at Ascalon in the 1st century AD a visitor saw 'an impossible number of doves' in the streets and houses, because they were sacred and no one ever killed them. Fishes were sacred to her also, perhaps for their numerous offspring.

The Jewish prophets condemned the worship of Astarte, not only because they believed that Yahweh was the one true god but also because of the sexual rituals of the goddess, who was served by sacred prostitutes. Their activities had a practical use, for their earnings financed the goddess's cult, but the sexuality of Astarte's worship was basically imitative magic, intended to sustain the fertility of Nature.

Greek and Roman writers were also repelled by the worship of the Middle Eastern goddesses whose rituals spread westwards, with their phallic symbols, sacred prostitutes and painted priests in women's clothes. In *The Golden Ass* Apuleius (born c 123 AD) describes the priests, 'their faces daubed with rouge and their eye sockets painted to bring out the brightness of their eyes', who carried the image of 'the Syrian goddess' about on an ass, dancing to the sound of castanets and cymbals, cutting themselves with knives and flagellating themselves for the edification of the spectators before going round with the collecting box. Earlier, in the biblical account of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, the Canaanite god's priests were said to 'cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them.'

The travelling lecturer and humorist Lucian, a contemporary of Apuleius, wrote an essay about the Astarte of Hierapolis, north-west of Aleppo in Syria. Tame bulls, bears, lions and eagles were kept in the grounds of the temple and there was a lake full of holy fishes, some of which knew their names and came when called. In the early summer there was a great festival of the goddess, when trees were brought and erected outside the temple, with goats, sheep and objects of gold and silver hung on them. The sacred idols were carried about among the trees and then burned.


Michael Holford


Giraudon

The temple attendants were eunuchs who wore white robes with pointed caps. They cut their arms till the blood ran, and beat each other. Sometimes a young man, carried away in the ecstasy of the goddess's worship, would devote himself to her service by castrating himself. He would then run through the city and the occupants of the house into which he threw his severed members would supply him with women's clothes.

Princes of Amity

As a result of the denunciations of Ashtoreth in the Old Testament as an 'abomination' and an enemy of God, Jews and Christians decided that she was a demon but for unknown reasons the goddess turned into a male demon, with very bad breath. If he is summoned up by a magician, he appears in human form, half black and half white. He reveals all events of the past, present and future, and knows all secrets.

In the magical textbooks the demon Astaroth has lost all connection with sex but in the early 17th century Astaroth and Asmodeus were among the devils who possessed Madeleine de Demandolx (see AIX-EN-PROVENCE NUNS). Under their influence, or so it was believed, she danced and sang lewd songs, writhed in indecent postures and told spine-chilling stories of orgies and cannibalism at witch-revels she had attended. In 1673 Madame de Montespan sacrificed children to Astaroth and Asmodeus, 'princes of amity', in her attempt to secure her hold on Louis XIV's affections by black magic (see BLACK MASS).

FURTHER READING: J. C. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths & Legends* (Attic Press, 1978); Donald Harden, *The Phoenicians* (Praeger); E. O. James, *The Ancient Gods* (Putnam 1964); W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (John Hopkins Press, 1957); Lucian's 'The Goddess of Syria' is in volume 4 of the Loeb edition of his works, though in an eccentric and tiresome translation.

Above The head and magical symbol of Astaroth from Francis Barrett's *Magus.* The goddess came to be considered a demon because the Old Testament prophets denounced the licentious rites with which she was worshipped

Left Astarte in alabaster, a Mesopotamian statue of the goddess of love c 2000 BC. The crescent or horn-shaped head-dress signifies her connection with the moon, and with sexuality

The experience of seeming to leave one's own body and look at it from outside is not uncommon. It usually happens briefly and involuntarily, but some people have deliberately experimented with 'astral travel'

ASTRAL BODY

FOR CENTURIES it has been a common idea that man is made of two components – a soul or spirit which comes from God, and a material body of flesh and blood. But some philosophers and occult theorists have suggested that each man has a third component, an astral body, meaning literally 'starry body' and sometimes called 'the body of light'.

This astral body is an exact copy of the flesh and blood body but is made of a finer material and has a shining and luminous appearance. It is supposed to be capable of separating itself from the physical body and travelling about, passing through walls, ceilings and other solid obstructions. It is also said to survive death, when it leaves the physical body. It exists in what is called the astral plane, which includes the normal, everyday, world but extends beyond it.

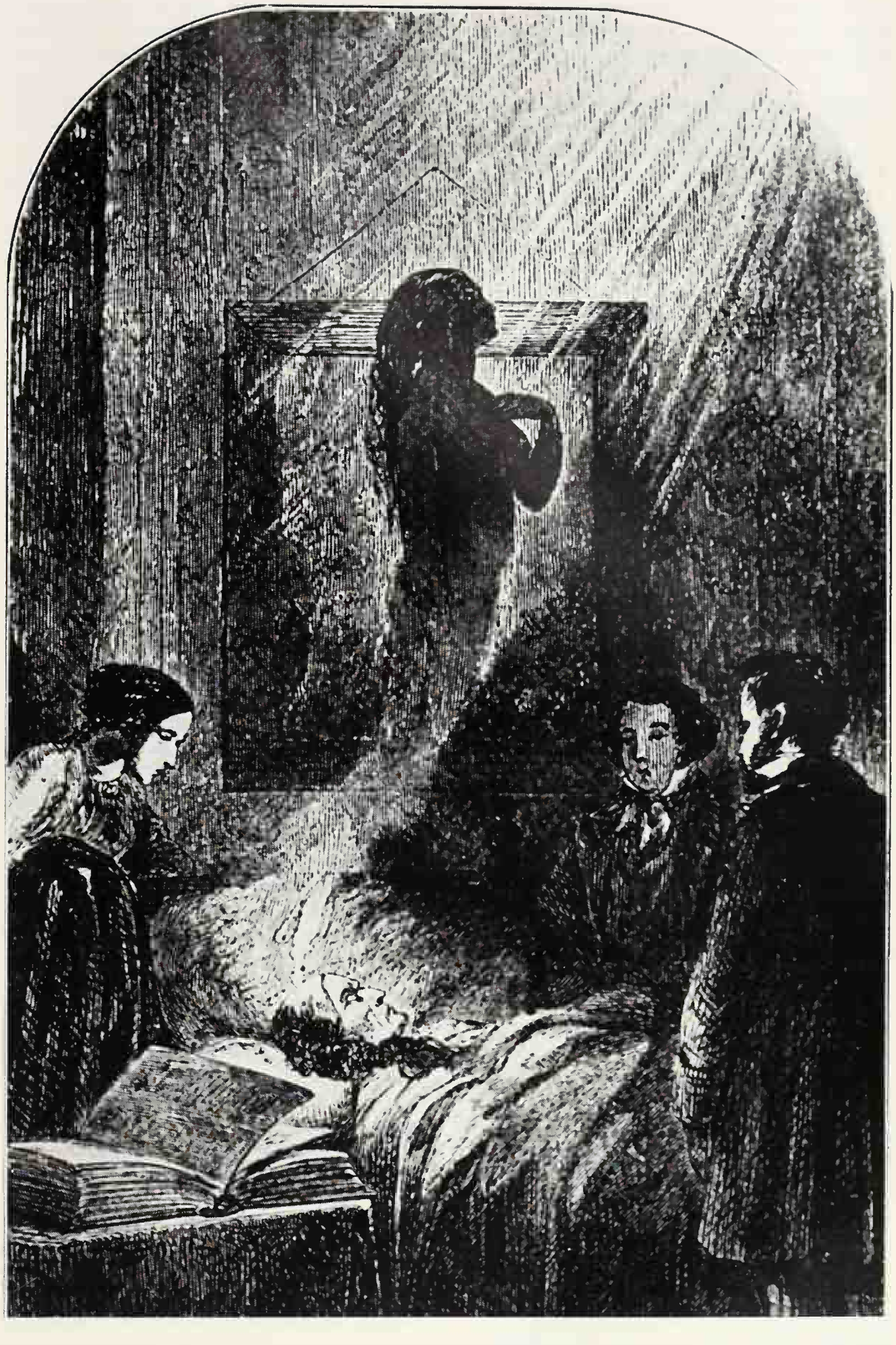
An amusing account of astral travel was given by the French Roman Catholic journalist and occultist Anne Osmont, who died in 1953. She described how, on her first attempt at astral travel, she succeeded in leaving behind physical evidence of what she had done. She was friendly with a husband and wife, both sculptors. The wife, who was called Annie, had one evening expressed her strong disbelief in the possibility of astral travel. Mlle Osmont resolved to prove her wrong the same night.

It took a full quarter of an hour of effort to project herself out of her physical body, and then, passing through the wall, she went to her friends' flat. They were asleep in bed. She took note of the colour and style of their nightclothes, but thought that was poor evidence, and looked around for some object to topple. On the mantelpiece was a gilt liqueur glass, and she tried to move it. It seemed as difficult to move as a piano, but presently she noticed it had moved a little, and continuing her efforts she got it to the edge and over. It smashed on the floor.

The couple sat up in bed with a start, and she heard Annie say grumpily, 'I bet it's that imbecile Osmont!' On her next ordinary visit she first saw the husband and repeated Annie's words to him. He recognized the reference and told her that his wife was very angry as the goblet had been a family heirloom. Mlle Osmont records that she was desperately exhausted for several days after, as a result of this effort. Such movement of physical objects while in the astral body is rare.

'It's not me, it's my double'

Dr Francis Lefébure, who at the time had been practising yoga breathing exercises for about seven years, describes an occasion when his astral body became visible. During World War Two he was the doctor at a prisoner-of-war camp near Guelma in Algeria. His ideas were well known in the officers' mess and he was the subject of much chaffing.



The astral body departing after death, as seen in a clairvoyant vision. It is also said to be capable of leaving the physical body during life, and travelling independently through walls and ceilings. This and all subsequent illustrations are from *The Projection of the Astral Body* by S. Muldoon and H.C.Carrington (Rider, 1929)

One morning, Lefébure was told to go and see the lieutenant. 'I went to find him. He was in the barber's shop. Always the first to chaff me, and fearless under fire, he didn't seem quite happy in my presence. This is more or less the story he gave me: "Last night about midnight, having gone to the little station (about three kilometres from the camp), I suddenly saw you so clearly there could be no possible mistake. I said to you, Hallo, Lefébure, what are you doing here at this time of night? And you replied, It's not me, it's my double! and then you disappeared as if by magic. Then I ran all the way to the camp and verified that you were in your room. I questioned the orderlies and the sentries, and they all guaranteed that you hadn't gone out during the night."

'The lieutenant, who seemed very impressed, did not make fun of me any more. As investigation proved that he was not in the least drunk that day, and that in fact he never was, the rumour spread in Guelma that I did strange tricks. Some months later I discovered that the phrase "It's not me, it's my double" was still famous in the town.'

Getting into the Astral Body

The proper method is as follows: Develop the body of Light until it is just as real to you as your other body... Ultimately, the relation of that body with your own must be exceedingly intimate; but before this harmonizing takes place, you should begin by a careful differentiation. The first thing to do, therefore, is to get the body outside your own. To avoid muddling the two, you begin by imagining a shape resembling yourself standing in front of you. Do not say: 'Oh, it's only imagination!' The time to test that is later on, when you have secured a fairly clear mental image of such a body. Try to imagine how your own body would look if you were standing in its place; try to transfer your consciousness to the Body of Light. Your own body has its eyes shut. Use the eyes of the Body of Light to describe the objects in the room behind you...

As soon as you feel more or less at home in the fine body, let it rise in the air. Keep on feeling the sense of rising: keep on looking about you as you rise until you see landscapes or beings of the astral plane. Such have a quality all their own. They are not like material things – they are not like mental pictures – they seem to lie between the two...

Now, however unsuccessful your getting out of the body may apparently have been, it is most necessary to use every effort to bring it properly back. Make the Body of Light coincide in space with the physical body... then recover the unity of consciousness. If you fail to do this properly you may find yourself in serious trouble. Your Body of Light may wander away uncontrolled, and be attacked and obsessed. You will become aware of this through the occurrence of headache, bad dreams, or even more serious signs such as hysteria, fainting fits, possibly madness or paralysis. Even the worst of these attacks will probably wear off, but it may leave you permanently damaged to a greater or less extent.

Aleister Crowley
Magick in Theory and Practice

The Sensation of Astral Travel

From accounts given by people who have travelled astrally, the general sensation is at first indistinguishable from the ordinary physical waking state, except sometimes for a feeling of well-being and buoyancy. Dr Lefébure cites instances where he found himself walking round his bedroom and at first could not tell whether he was sleepwalking in his normal body or travelling in his astral body – until he felt himself floating upwards. He compares the limbs of the double to the phantom limbs felt by an amputee. He describes using his phantom arms to lever up the top half of his phantom body; but he adds that the most satisfactory results followed when he withdrew upwards from feet to head, like drawing a sword from its sheath.

To project himself astrally, Dr Lefébure relied on an effort of will, but also used yoga exercises involving more and more extended intervals of suspension of breathing.

The most experienced of modern astral travellers, the American author Sylvan Muldoon, attaches importance first to the building into the subconscious of a strong desire to be conscious in the astral body, then to the practice of concentrating on one's own image in a mirror. Next, attention is to be centred on the rhythm of the heartbeats, and the attempt made to be conscious of the heart beating at any point in the body. Then by repeated mental suggestion the heart should be slowed down. Needless to say, no one with heart weakness or irregularity should use this method.

Muldoon's unique series of experiences probably hinged on his abnormally slow heartbeat and his general frail health. He emphasizes that it is the feeling of suspense in the mind, not the actual projection of the astral body, that is unpleasant. He says that a really intense study of, and desire for, astral projection will always bring results because the force built up in the subconscious will inevitably express itself.

The evidence points to the possibility that some apparitions, or immaterial appearances of persons living or dead, are due to the presence of an astral body. There is the phenomenon of an observed apparition where more than one person, differently situated, sees the figure from an angle appropriate to his position. An example is the case of Lady B. and her daughter, who in about 1892 claimed they had seen the ghostly figure of a woman looking at herself in a mirror in their bedroom. Hornell Hart writes of the occurrence in *The Enigma of Survival*. 'Lady B. saw the face in quarter profile, the head intercepting its own reflection in the mirror. Miss B. saw the back of the figure with its long dark hair; the face was not directly visible to her, but she saw it clearly reflected in the mirror.' The record shows that the aspects seen by the two ladies were just as if a physical person had stood there.

Envelope of the Soul

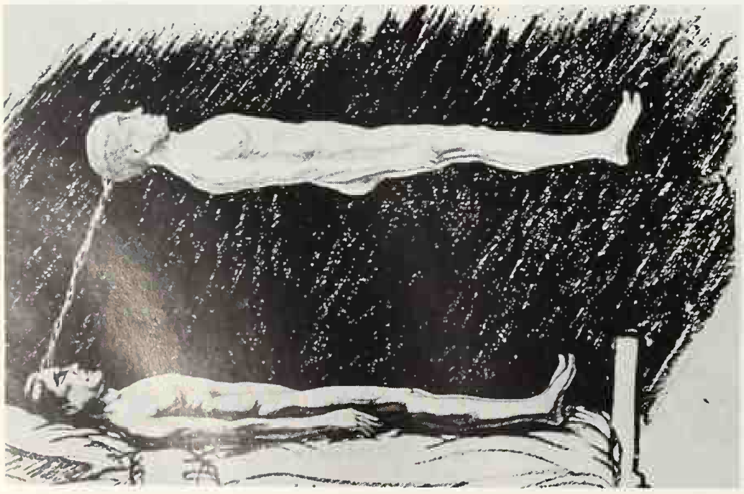
The idea of an astral body is very old. Ancient Indian writings describe the eight *siddhis* or supernormal powers which can be acquired through a type of yoga called *pranayama*. The sixth of these is 'flying in the sky', apparently referring to what is now called astral projection.

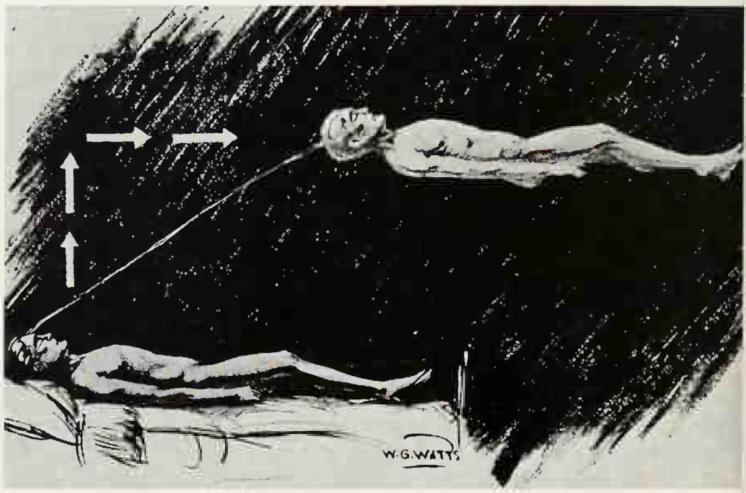
E. R. Dodds has shown that the western idea of the astral body originated in classical Greek philosophy, apparently without any important influences from oriental ideas. In his *Laws* (Book 10) Plato discusses the souls of the stars, which guide them in their courses. Some believe, he says, that these souls have bodies 'of fire, or it may be of air' in addition to the material bodies of the stars: though he also says that the human soul is not visible and 'enfolds us in a fashion utterly imperceptible to all bodily senses'. In the *Timaeus* the Creator is said to have made souls which he 'mounted' on the stars 'as it were on chariots'. These souls were later to be born as men and, if they lived good lives, would return happily to the stars in the life after death.

Plato's pupil Aristotle developed a theory of *pneuma* (air or breath) as a constituent of the bodies of men and animals in which the sensitive soul resides and which 'is analogous to that element of which the stars are made'.

The linking together of the starry soul chariots, the fiery or airy bodies of the souls of stars, and the Aristotelian starry soul container, produced the idea of the astral body as a starry envelope of the soul.

The theory was taken up by the Neoplatonist philosophers. Porphyry, for instance, in the 3rd century AD, said that as the soul descends from heaven to earth, where it will





The most famous of modern astral travellers was the American author Sylvan Muldoon. He believed that an intense desire for astral projection would always bring results
Below **The astral body lying in the air above the physical body, to which it is connected by an elastic 'cord'. Arrows show the route the phantom takes in projecting. The phantom then stands upright, though the push and pull of the 'cord' causes instability in the phantom. Finally the phantom interiorizes, or returns to the physical body**

acquire a physical body, its pneuma gradually thickens and darkens as it absorbs moisture from the air, until it can be seen visibly. After death, the soul's efforts to climb back up to heaven again are hampered by this moist envelope, to such an extent that it may even be carried downwards, to a place of punishment. However, if it succeeds in rising, it gradually sheds the envelope. Some disembodied spirits have a misty pneuma which takes any shape they care to imagine, so that they appear to us in different guises, as gods perhaps or as souls of the dead.

The notion of the astral body has a continuous history in the West from classical times on. Dante's *Purgatorio* (canto 25), written in the 14th century, says that after death the soul 'around it beams its own creative power, like to its living form in shape and size... the circumambient air adopts the shape the soul imposes on it'. In the 16th century, Agrippa von Nettesheim seems to refer to astral travel when he talks of 'vacation of the body, when the spirit is enabled to transcend its bounds, and as a light escaped from a lantern to spread over space'.

The Astral Plane

The world inhabited by the astral body is the 'astral plane' or 'desire world', a spiritual sphere of existence which includes our ordinary, everyday physical world but extends beyond it. Everything known in the physical world is said to have its counterpart on the astral plane, including every thought, emotion, desire and fantasy. This is the plane we visit in dreams and the world in which our longings and imaginings have an independent reality.

According to occult theory, just as everything in the physical world today has its astral image, so every event that has occurred since the beginning of time has left an impression of itself on the astral plane. These impressions constitute the so-called Akashic Records, which in theory can be consulted by clairvoyance or in deep meditation. Many modern occult teachers claim to have consulted the Akashic Records, though the difficulty of distinguishing observation of them from mere imagination and fantasy is evident.

The Etheric Double

The astral body is frequently confused with another immaterial envelope, the 'etheric body' or 'double', which got its name from 19th-century physics, when the 'ether' was the hypothetical medium through which electromagnetic waves were thought to travel. The etheric body is said to be closer to the material plane than the astral body, though invisible to ordinary sight. It is the vital force or 'wiring system', as it were, which gives the physical body life and feeling. It can leave the physical body, as it does under total anesthesia, but remains connected to it by a shining cord. At death, however, 'the silver cord is loosed' and the etheric body finally leaves its fleshly envelope. Many sensitives have claimed to see a misty, transparent form rising from the body of a dying person or animal and disappearing from view.

The fact that Sylvan Muldoon placed so much emphasis on the 'cord' which linked his projected double to his physical body suggests that his experiences involved the extrusion of the etheric double from his physical self as well as the astral body.

Another false trail occurs in the concept of the likeness of a person projected at some point in space by his intense thought or reverie. In Scotland they spoke of 'the forerunner', meaning some manifestation of a person's presence occurring at his destination before he arrived there. This is different from the conception of an astral body, which contains the full functioning consciousness.

The true astral body also applies to the condition of some dream states, and to the experience of seeming to be dissociated from one's body during sleep or loss of physical consciousness. The dream-cures at the shrines of the Greek god of healing, Asclepios (see HEALING GODS), which apparently affected a ghostly counterpart of the physical body, seem to have been concerned with the etheric double rather than the astral.

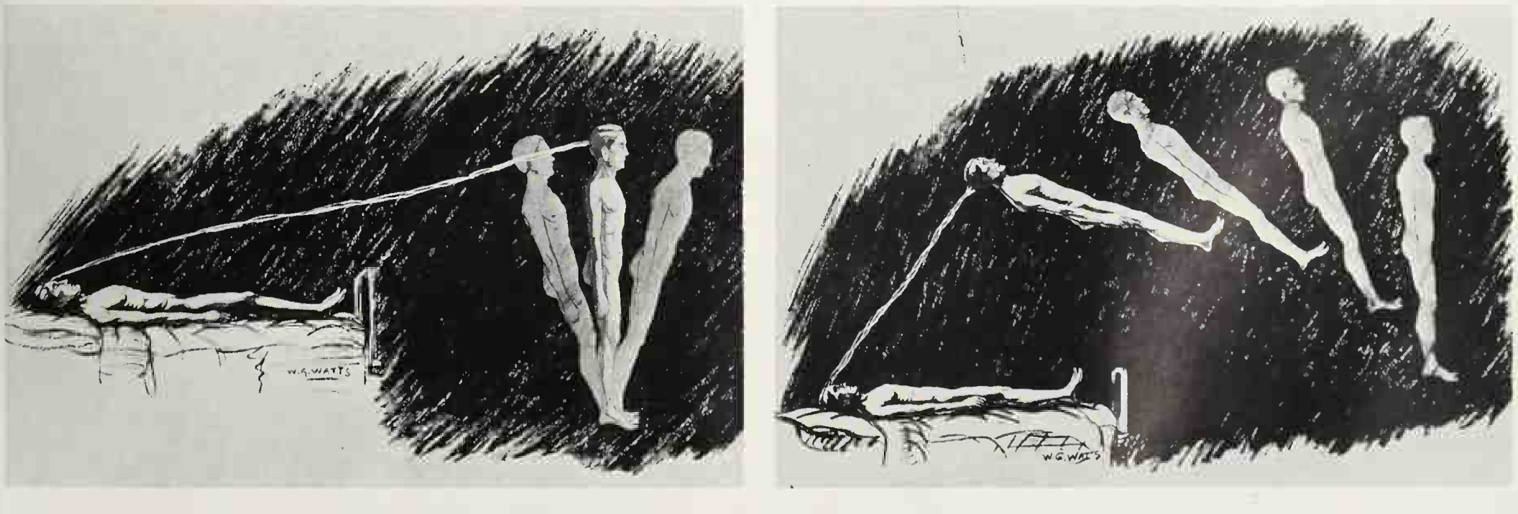
Fantasy or Reality?

Of modern authorities some, like D.J.West and Antony Flew, maintain an attitude of good-humoured scepticism towards astral bodies and projections. On the other side Professor Hart's conclusions are noteworthy. He has summarized with great fairness the evidence and contentions of the holders of all points of view, sceptical or convinced, in his *The Enigma of Survival.* He thinks that 'these diversities among the different descriptions of the astral world, and of the afterlife in general, cannot be explained by claiming that all such accounts are mere fantasies. The verified evidence of the reality of astral projection seems quite conclusive, and the evidence that apparitions of the dead may often be, and usually are, vehicles of surviving conscious personalities, seems also to be convincing'.

(See also DOUBLE; LIGHT; OUT-OF-THE-BODY EXPERIENCES.)

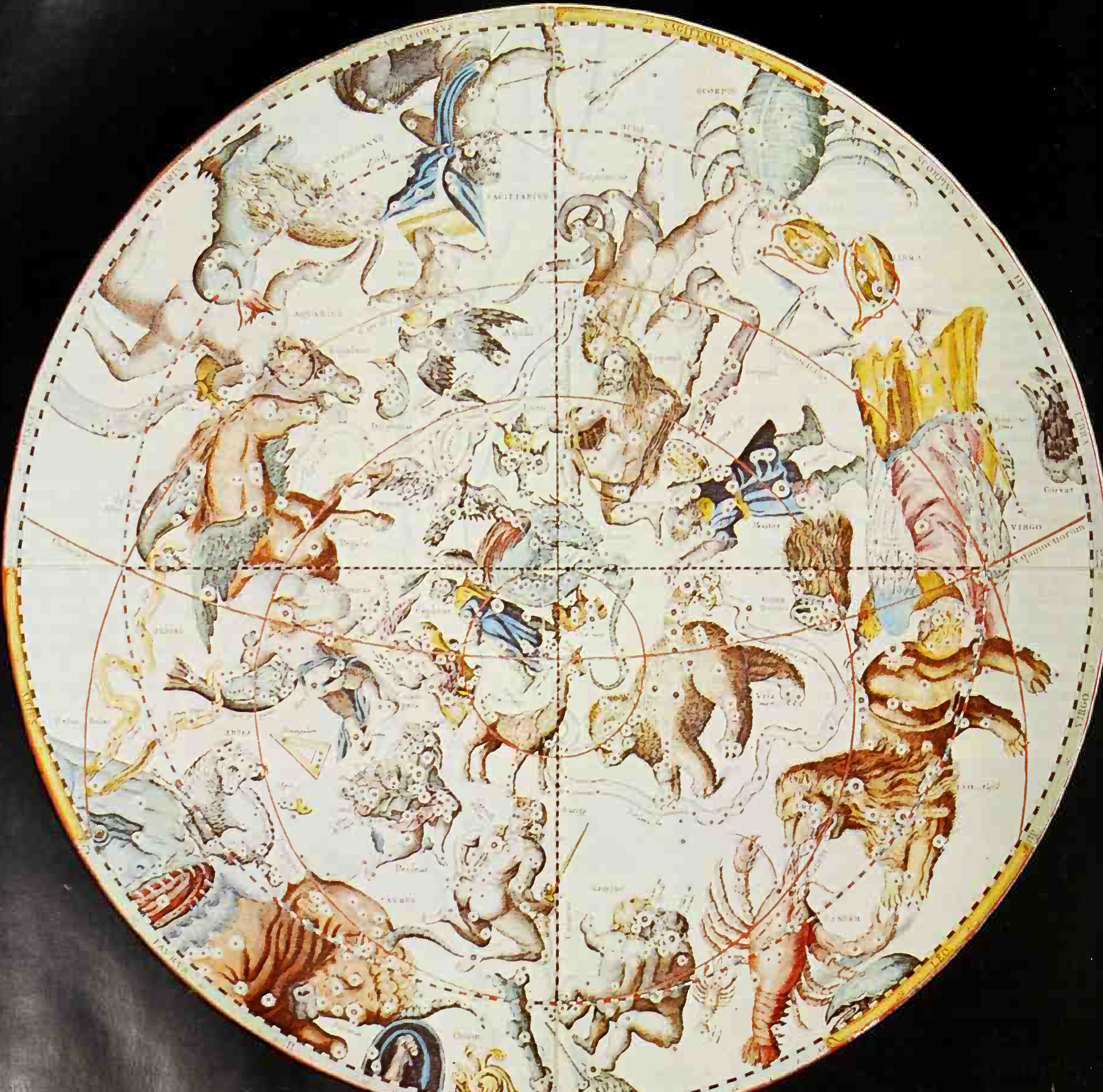
C. NELSON STEWART*

FURTHER READING: B. Walker, *Beyond the Body: the Human Double and the Astral Planes* (Routledge, 1974); H. Hart, *The Enigma of Survival* (Rider, 1959), O. Fox, *Astral Projection* (University Books, 1962). For the Greek origins and the Neoplatonists, see E.R.Dodds, *Proclus: The Elements of Theology* (Clarendon Press, 1923), appendix 2.



ASTROLOGY

Buried in the earth lies evidence of our past; on its surface we live in the present; and it has long been believed that in the sky the stars predict our future


SAGITTARIVS
SCORPIVS
LIBRA
VIRGO
VIRGO
LEO
CANCER

British Muse

ASTROLOGY IS PERHAPS the oldest of the sciences. From its early beginnings in Babylonia until the late Middle Ages in Europe, no distinction was made between astrology and what we now call astronomy. On the one hand, astrology was descriptive, naming and charting the constellations and observing the movements of the heavens; on the other hand, it was predictive, as astrologers discovered that they could forecast those movements.

The 'fixed' stars, the vault of heaven, appeared to turn above the earth like a huge bowl; but voyaging through that heaven, sometimes steadily, sometimes erratically, went seven other 'stars', which the Greeks later called the planets, meaning 'wanderers': the Sun, the Moon, and what we now call by the Roman names of Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn (the Babylonians had other names, but with similar implications).

For centuries these planets were regarded as the gods themselves. Although some of them sometimes appeared to go back upon their tracks, and all moved at different speeds, they kept within a narrow band of the heavens, marked out by twelve characteristic constellations, which we know as the zodiac, from the Greek meaning 'circle of animals'. To the early astrologers, these constellations represented the houses of the gods, which they visited from time to time, sometimes meeting – two, three or four together – in each other's houses. The Sun's house was in Leo, at the height of summer when he was in his greatest strength, and the Moon's house next-door, in Cancer. The other five planets each had two houses, one for day and one for night.

The astrologers believed that events in heaven were mirrored by events on earth. If, then, they could predict the movements of the planets, they believed that it should be equally possible to predict what would happen on earth. This was certainly true of the cycle of the seasons, and other occurrences such as eclipses, so why should it not be true of all human events?

The Horoscope

The relative positions of each planet at any given moment could be marked upon a schematic map of the heavens. This is what is called a horoscope. It shows the position of each planet in the great circle of the zodiac in relation to the earth at the centre. Half of the circle at any one time is invisible below the earth, but the astrologers knew that the circle turned constantly, and their records told them that the circle made a complete cycle each day, and so, although they could not see most of the planets by day, and certainly could not see the stars behind them, they knew which houses they were in.

Left **The zodiac is a circular band in the sky through which the planets are seen to move. It is divided into 12 equal sections, which are given the names of the related constellations. In astrology, a planet's influence varies according to which part of the zodiac it is occupying. The *Planesphaerium Copernicus*, a chart of the heavens, c 17th century, showing the zodiac signs in the outer ring**

The most important moment in any person's life was the moment of his or her birth. Since the gods determined all human destiny, the influence of the planets at that moment would affect the whole of that person's life. A horoscope drawn for that moment would therefore form a predictive document of their future. As time passed, and the influences changed, later horoscopes could be drawn, representing changes that the gods had determined, but this natal horoscope remained the most important.

In a modern horoscope, these planetary positions must be calculated in relation to a given moment of time and a specific geographical co-ordinate, expressed in degrees and minutes of latitude (north or south of the equator) and longitude (east or west of the meridian of Greenwich).

Before the invention of radar, all navigation, both terrestrially and in the air, was made by means of observation of such planetary positions. The daily 'shooting the sun' on board ship, by means of a sextant at midday, was the only way of determining longitude for several centuries, and the necessity to know the exact time led to the development of ever more accurate chronometers. If the sun was obscured by cloud, it became even more important to observe the position of other planets visible by night, and yearly 'nautical almanacs', giving the position of the major planets, are still published for the benefit of yachtsmen. It is perfectly possible to calculate a horoscope from such an almanac, but astrologers use similar publications, known as ephemerides, which give the positions of all the planets, including those that have been discovered by astronomers since the beginning of the 19th century, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto.

Two thousand years ago, the Sun was at the beginning of the house of Aries at the spring equinox, round about 22 March, and all planetary positions are measured from 0°Aries. However, the earth is not rotating simply about its axis, but is very slowly wobbling, like a spinning top beginning to slow down, and over some 24,000 years the axis describes a small circle. The result of this is that the spring equinox 'precesses' through the circle of the zodiac, moving backwards through the constellations. What is called 0°Aries has been moving steadily through the constellation Pisces for the last two thousand years, and early in the 21st century will enter Aquarius. This is what is meant when it is said that we are approaching 'the age of Aquarius', when the Sun at the spring equinox will appear to be in the house of Aquarius; but both navigational almanacs and astrologers still place the equinox at 0°Aries, and say that the Sun is in Aries.

Today almost everyone knows his or her zodiacal sign. If a person says that he or she was born 'under Taurus' it means that their birth occurred approximately between 21 April and 22 May, when the Sun would have been anywhere between 0°-30° Taurus. If, however, he states that he was born on 10 May 1950, the Sun's position was at about 19° Taurus, which is more specific. Finally, in the case of a birth at exactly noon (Greenwich Mean Time) on that day, the Sun was at 19° 15' 17" Taurus, which is even more precise. The theories of scientific astrology require the horoscope to be calculated upon the basis of an *accurate* time and, as has already been mentioned, an identifiable geographical location. These are the essential requirements for a strictly *individual* horoscope. The astrological 'information' published in newspapers and magazines does not refer to individual horoscopes.

Truth or Nonsense?

The fact that so many people know their birth sign is a product of the mass circulation newspaper and periodical astrological journalism that began during the early 1930s. Those who have a detailed knowledge of the principles of astrology almost unanimously condemn this 'popular' astrology as childish nonsense. Nevertheless, the daily forecasts and the feature articles in magazines have persuaded countless thousands that 'the stars' may conceivably influence human destinies and that an individual personality in some way reflects the psychological qualities traditionally ascribed to his or her zodiacal sign.

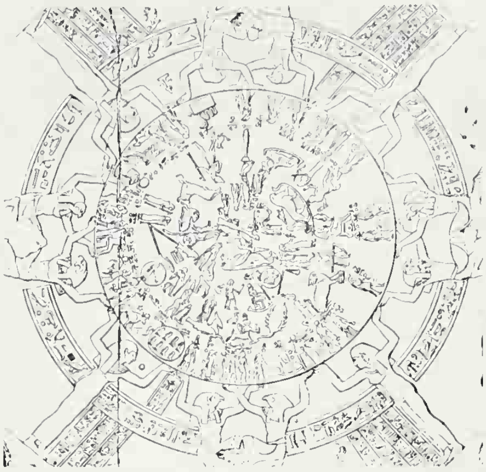
As for the daily prognostications, it is obvious that by the law of averages a proportion of the readership will suppose that this or that prediction has been fulfilled. All the same, we are confronted with a system which divides humanity into types based on astrological symbolism, and this is perhaps astrology's most interesting feature.

Despite all its unsatisfactory qualities, 'scientific' natal astrology, which means analyzing your personality from your horoscope – as opposed to predicting future events – raises a great many fascinating, although probably insoluble, problems. Logically the 'art' should be dismissed as the obstinate survival of very ancient superstitious beliefs. However, it is possible that fairly accurate, although limited, deductions can, in fact, be made from a natal or birth horoscope.

What is surprising is the survival of a system of divination which eventually reached the West in the 12th century via Latin translations of Arabic texts (10th century), which were themselves based upon far earlier Hellenistic Greek texts (c 150 BC - 350 AD).

The Modern Revival

The astrological tradition in the form that is encountered today consists of a huge collection of rules and procedures which have been transmitted through the centuries, although not without substantial alterations and reformulations. In the West the contemporary astrological idiom represents an up-to-date version of the one current at the time of the Renaissance, when there was a widespread interest in astrology in educated circles. The invention of printing (c 1440) facilitated the circulation



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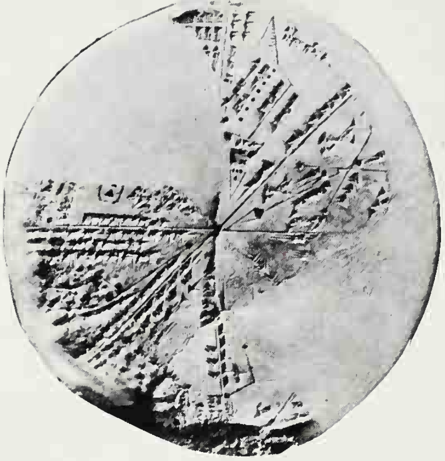


Mansell Collection

Far left The zodiac as we know it is a combined invention of the Egyptians and Babylonians. An ancient Egyptian map of the sky, the 'Zodiac of Denderah'

Left Astrology originally developed in Mesopotamia and was more concerned with kings and peoples than with the destinies of individuals; a tablet giving astrological forecasts in cuneiform writing, derived from observations of the moon

Right The zodiac man from *Les Tres Riches Heures* of the Duc de Berry shows the association between astrological signs and the parts of the human body. For example, people born under Leo, which controls the heart, are believed likely to suffer from heart trouble. Similarly Aquarians may suffer from weak ankles and Librans from kidney troubles

of material that had hitherto only existed in manuscript form, and the publication of ephemerides containing the daily noon positions of the Sun, Moon and planets. Astrology still ranked as astronomy's twin sister and enjoyed equal respectability.

Educated men began to lose interest in astrology towards the beginning of the 17th century, when the discoveries of the first of the modern astrologers, including Galileo, Copernicus and Kepler, were beginning to be understood. This increasing scepticism was evident in Europe, but not in England, where there was a noticeably lively interest in astrology during the second half of the 17th century. This was reflected by the large domestic output of textbooks and predictive almanacs.

Astrology was already well underground in Europe during the 18th century and in England the appearance of new textbooks dwindled to a trickle between 1700 and c1790. But while astrology was practically forgotten in Europe until the end of the 19th century, there were minor astrological revivals in England during the 1790s and 1820s and an important one during the 1890s. The French did not rediscover the art until c1890 and the German revival only began shortly before the First World War. Indeed, if the British had not kept astrology alive when it was forgotten elsewhere, it might conceivably have disappeared altogether. The British and French revivals during the 1890s, and the somewhat later German one, were by-products of a new and widespread interest in occultism, magic, the Cabala and, above all, H.P.Blavatsky's Theosophical teachings (see BLAVATSKY; THEOSOPHY). Alan Leo (1860-1917) the first important modern astrological publicist and the author of a long series of popular textbooks, was above all a Theosophical astrologer. This meant, in effect, that for Leo and his followers astrology had a considerable esoteric or occult component. Even today the ranks of the astrologers contain many who claim to be occultists.

It was the Germans, in particular, who investigated and experimented with astrology with enormous energy and interest during the years between the two World Wars. Furthermore, many of these people were highly educated men and women. During the early 1930s, for instance, at least 30 German medical men practised astrology and there were undoubtedly many more whose names are unrecorded. While the German astrological movement contained the expected quota of charlatans and mild lunatics, a cultured and intelligent minority worked on the development of a new kind of astrology based, as far as possible, upon current academic psychological and typological concepts.

Jung and Astrology

C.G.Jung (see JUNG), whose renown as a pioneer in the field of analytical psychology almost equals that of Sigmund Freud, had a deep personal interest in astrology. In 1931 he observed that 'the cultural philistines believed until recently that astrology had been disposed of long since and was something that could safely be laughed at. But today, rising out of the social deeps, it knocks at the doors of the universities, from which it was banished some 300 years ago'.

Elsewhere Jung wrote: 'For those of my readers who are unaware of these things and think that I am exaggerating, I can point to the easily verifiable fact that the heyday of astrology was not in the benighted Middle Ages but is in the middle of the 20th century, when even the newspapers do not hesitate to publish the week's horoscope. A thin layer of rootless rationalists reads with satisfaction that in the year 1723 Mr So-and-so had a horoscope cast for his children, and do not know that nowadays the horoscope has almost attained the rank of a visiting card.'

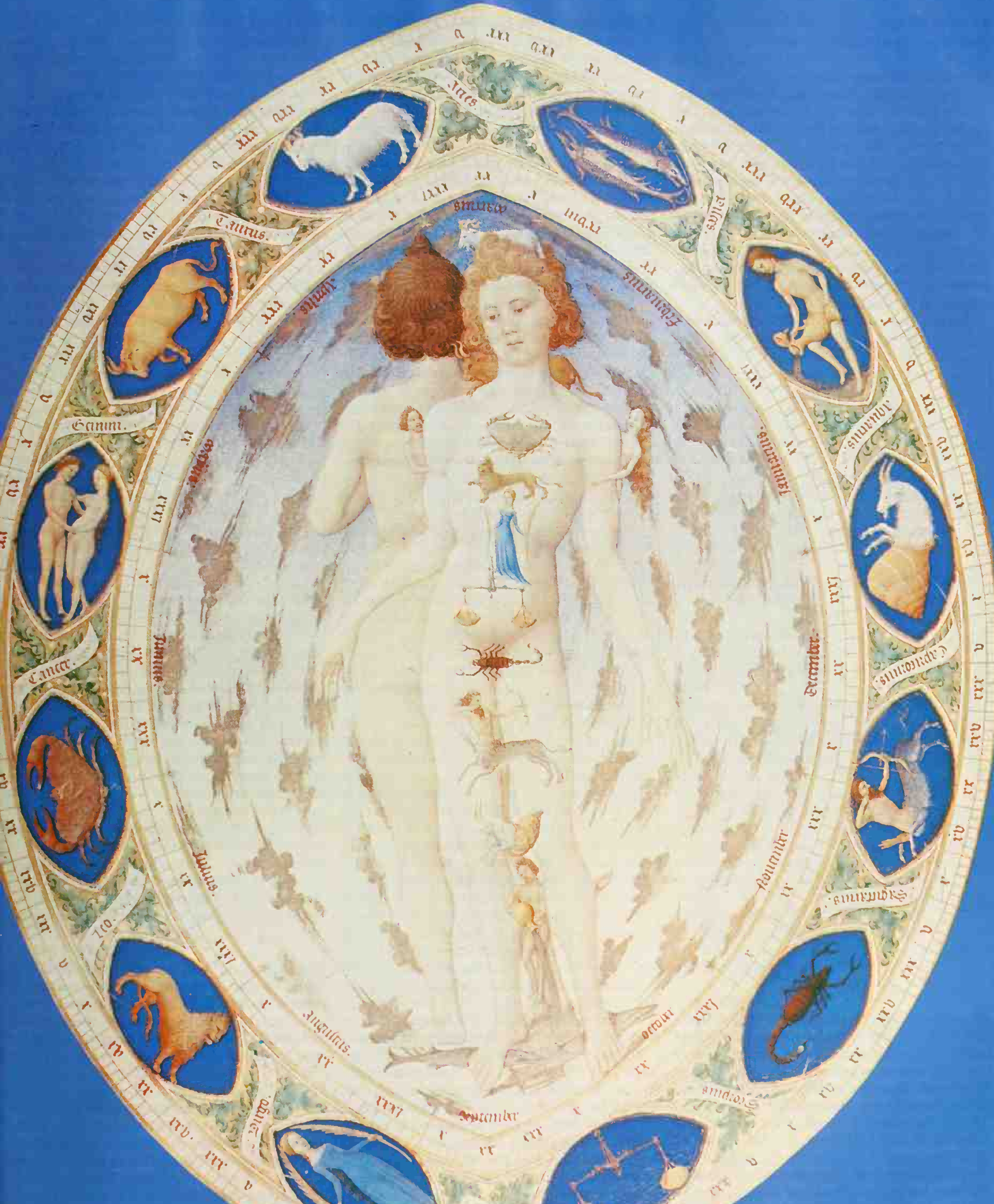
It is evident that Jung himself studied the horoscopes of some of his patients, not in order to predict their future, but because he believed that a natal horoscope could provide information of a purely psychological nature – for example, why an individual might be latently susceptible to a particular kind of neurosis.

Theoretically, then, if a medically trained psychologist can use astrology successfully for psycho-diagnostic purposes, it could also be employed for personnel selection, or to assess whether or not two people who intend to marry are temperamentally suited to one another. In Germany the present writer has met professional experts on handwriting who are engaged by large firms to sift written applications for jobs and to identify the most promising applicants. Some of them also take a look at the candidates' horoscopes as an additional check. In Europe copies of birth certificates are frequently required to be submitted in such cases, and on these the birth time is stated, at least within about 15 minutes.

British and American birth certificates do not record the birth time. In the absence of the latter it is impossible to calculate a more or less accurate Ascendant and without the Ascendant the horoscope is incomplete. In the absence of a birth time one can only erect the horoscope on the basis of noon Greenwich Mean Time for the day of birth,

ARIES	♈	21 Mar.	LIBRA	♎	23 Sept.
TAURUS	♉	20 Apr.	SCORPIO	♏	24 Oct.
GEMINI	♊	21 May	SAGITTARIUS	♐	23 Nov.
CANCER	♋	22 June	CAPRICORN	♑	22 Dec.
LEO	♌	23 July	AQUARIUS	♒	20 Jan.
VIRGO	♍	23 Aug.	PISCES	♓	19 Feb.

The twelve signs of the zodiac in their conventional order, with the approximate date when the Sun 'enters' each sign

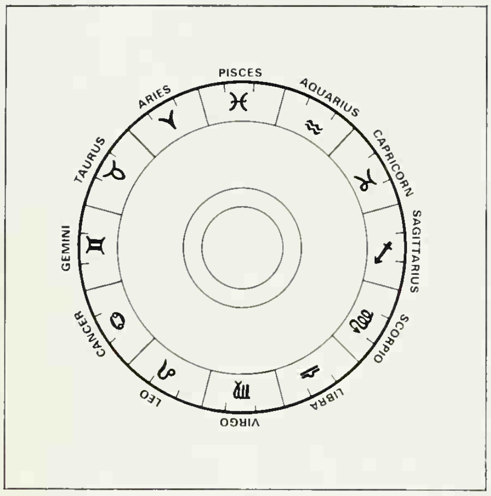

Aries
Pisces
Aquarius
Capricornus
Sagittarius
Scorpius
Virgo
Leo.
Cancer
Gemini
Taurus.
Januarius
Februarius
Martius
Aprilis
Maius
Junius
Julius
Augustus
Septembr
October
Novembr
Decembr

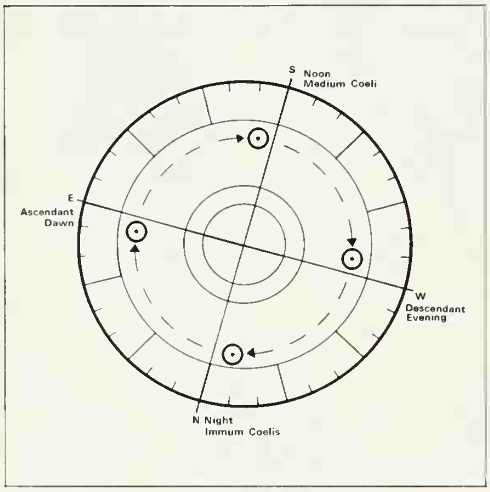
Giraudon

and therefore it could equally well apply to everyone else born on that day.

Drawing a Horoscope

Diagramatically a horoscope represents the circle of the zodiac as it surrounds the Earth, divided into twelve equal divisions, each given the name of one of the constellations. Into this are inserted the positions of the ten 'planets' at the time for which the horoscope is drawn. Most prominent among these is that of the Sun. The second figure below represents the Sun ascending at dawn, reaching the *Medium Coeli* (Mid-heaven) at noon, setting in the evening (Descendant), and below the horizon at midnight *(Immum Coeli).*





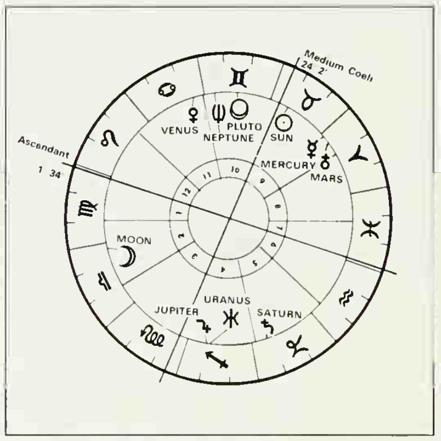
During the course of a 24-hour period every one of the 360 degrees of the zodiac successively 'rises' on the eastern celestial horizon. Roughly speaking, therefore, every two hours a new zodiacal sign is on the Ascendant. In order to discover the position of the Ascendant (expressed for instance as '18° 27' Leo rising') the astrologer must first calculate the MC (Midheaven). This is done with the help of an ephemeris and a few simple arithmetical computations. Once the MC has been identified the degree of the Ascendant can be found in the appropriate tables.

The horoscope of K.E.Krafft, the Swiss who was wrongly supposed to have been Hitler's personal astrologer, will serve as a typical example for an abbreviated account of the procedure for calculating a horoscope. He was born at Basle on 10 May 1900 at 12.45 p.m. Central European Time. His Sun was therefore in Taurus.

Since all the information in an ephemeris is based on noon Greenwich Mean Time, it is necessary to convert CET to GMT by subtracting one hour, giving a birth time of 11.45 a.m.

Basle is 47° 34' north of the equator and 7° 40' east of Greenwich. First the *sidereal time* ('star-time', not clock time) must be calculated, because the earth does not make its single revolution in exactly 24 hours. This is determined for 11.45 a.m. GMT, and then the 7° 40' E is converted to minutes and seconds of time (because Basle is east of the meridian of Greenwich, and we require to know the local sidereal time. Following this, a reference to the tables for latitude 47° North shows that Krafft's MC was 24° Taurus and the related Ascendant 1° 43' Virgo.

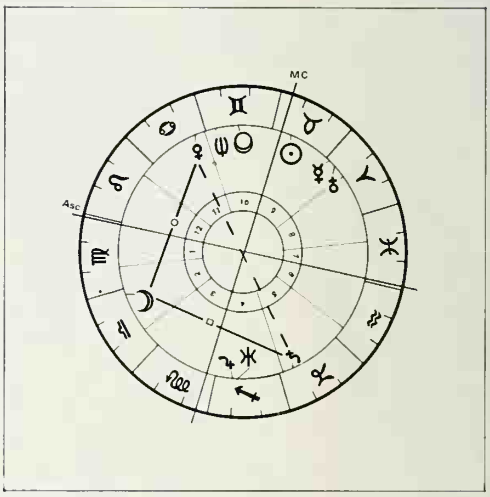
The next step is to establish the actual zodiacal positions of the planets at 11.45 a.m. on 10 May 1900. The birth time was so close to noon that with the exception of the Moon, for which a small adjustment (7' 27") is required, one could take the actual noon positions direct from the ephemeris. If the birth had occurred at, say, 7.45 p.m. some further simple arithmetical calculations would be needed. At Kraft's birth, the planetary positions were as shown above.



Sun 19.21 Taurus
Moon 2.17 Libra
Mercury 29.08 Aries
Venus 4.20 Cancer
Mars 24.49 Aries
Jupiter 8.08 Sagittarius
Saturn 4 .30 Capricorn
Uranus 11.22 Sagittarius
Neptune 25.21 Gemini
Pluto 15.30 Gemini

The division of the horoscope into twelve Houses has no direct connection with the constellations after which they are named – because some constellations extend over considerably more than one-twelfth of the zodiac circle, and others are much smaller. In addition, a distinction has to be made between the traditional planetary 'houses', represented by the twelve divisions of the zodiac circle, and the twelve Houses that are determined by the position of the Ascendant.

The Houses are numbered anti-clockwise from the Ascendant. The cusps (boundaries) of the 1st, 4th, 7th and 10th Houses are identical with the four angles (Asc, IC, Desc and MC). The boundaries of the remaining Houses can vary (resulting, as can be seen, in Houses of varying angular size) according to the mathematical system of House division employed. As a consequence, one astrologer will show the Sun in, say, the 3rd House, while another, working on an identical chart, will have it in the 2nd. Since the mathematics of House division require a knowledge of spherical trigonometry, the majority of astrologers are content to use published Tables of Houses. The figure shows Krafft's horoscope with the twelve Houses calculated according to the 'Placidus' system of house division.



Finally there are the so-called 'aspects', which are certain angular distances, expressed in degrees, between any two or more planets. The aspects mainly considered are:

Conjunction 0°
Square 90°
Trine 120°
Sesqui-quadrate 145°
Opposition 180°
Semi-square 45°
Sextile 60°

The fourth figure (above) shows Krafft's horoscope with the addition of the more prominent aspects. For example, the Moon is square (90°) to both Venus and Saturn and sextile (60°) to the Ascendant. Venus is in opposition to Saturn.

The Key to the Code

To sum up: a horoscope erected upon the basis of a known birth time and geographical co-ordinate contains the following factors: twelve 30° zodiacal sectors; ten planets in their respective zodiacal positions; twelve Houses, the boundary of the first being the Ascendant; four 'angles' Asc, Desc, MC and IC; and the planetary aspects.

We have, then, a diagram that purports to record an 'astral' moment of time, but expressed in a symbolical code which must now be deciphered. This is the most difficult task of all. The astrologer begins his or her analysis on the basis of a number of assumptions:

1. That each planet works or operates in a different and characteristic manner, hence the occurrence in everyday speech of adjectives such as *martial* (Mars), *mercurial* (Mercury), *saturnine* (Saturn) and *jovial* (Jupiter). It is supposed that a planet's 'influence' will be particularly strong if it is close to an angle and, in particular, to the Ascendant or MC. In Krafft's case Neptune, Pluto and Sun are all 'dominant' because they are near to the MC. His Moon is possibly sufficiently near to the Ascendant also to be assessed as dominant.
2. That a planet reflects the particular qualities of the zodiacal sign in which it is placed: so Mars in Gemini will not have the same significance as Mars in Sagittarius, and its presence in Aries (its night house) or Scorpio (its day house) will be of particular importance.
3. That a planet will operate according to its House position. Thus Venus in the 10th can suggest one thing and Venus in the 5th another.
4. That their angular relationships, or aspects, will modify the influences of the planets concerned.

The art of interpretation involves the combination of all the available evidence and, as we have mentioned, this is where the difficulties begin. There are countless astrological manuals or 'cook books', which provide guidance of a kind for every conceivable factor. For instance, the novice may make a note: 'Sun in Taurus in the 9th House; Mars in Aquarius in the 6th House; Sun square to Mars.' According to the manual he uses he will now have to consider anything from a bald and very brief statement to a detailed essay. So he jots down his interpretative material and is then uncertain how to combine it together. If he happens to be acquainted with the person whose chart he is studying, he will believe that this or that 'appears to fit' but will be left with a good deal of apparent nonsense. Most astrologers never get much beyond this 'cook book' method of interpretation.

Expert Deductions

The few who seem to excel at horoscope interpretation, including the people who can often make quite impressive deductions on the basis of a 'blind diagnosis' – meaning that they have no personal knowledge of the native (subject) – do not have to depend on such 'cook book' techniques. Nor do they necessarily try to find an interpretation for every factor in the chart. They appear to have an almost instinctive knowledge of astrological symbolism and at the same time a highly developed intuition. The writer's own experience is that they can often deduce a few extremely salient facts of a purely psychological nature.

The quality of such experts' work is apt to become diluted when they attempt to wring the last shred of 'evidence' from a horoscope, for it is a fallacy to expect that the chart itself will 'reveal all'. Nevertheless, when correctly interpreted, a horoscope will sometimes yield information of a surprisingly accurate nature.

There are, of course, a great many logical objections to astrological analysis of this kind. For example, suppose that two children have been born at the same time in the same hospital, and that one becomes a manual worker and the second a surgeon. The astrologer will be confronted with two identical horoscopes, but the subjects' respective social and educational backgrounds will necessarily be different. Then how can one talk in terms of identical 'fates'? We are not so much concerned with fate, however, as with the hypothesis that each will react to life's psychological situations according to a common pattern, although always in specific relation to his social milieu and understanding – there will, for example, be a large element of free will. To identify the common denominator is in any case extremely difficult. Thus in astrological interpretation very little is absolutely cut and dried.

It would be tempting to write astrology off as a waste of time were it not for case histories such as the one recorded by the Institute for Border Areas of Psychology, at the University of Freiburg in Germany. A team of qualified psychologists spent a fair number of hours interviewing a young juvenile delinquent who had been sent to them by the local police, and their extensive written reports were then locked away in the Institute's safe. In the meantime Herr Walter Boer, a local schoolmaster who was not only an expert astrologer but had some psychological training, was invited to study the boy's horoscope.

Herr Boer did not know the identities of either the young man or of the psychologists who had examined him. Nor had he any access to their reports. Yet Herr Boer's findings were very much in line with those of the psychologists, so that he was able successfully to identify a disturbed and erratic personality. It is not that Herr Boer possessed some unknown astrological secret. One can only point to an unusually sound grasp of the principles of astrological interpretation, allied to what were evidently highly developed intuitive powers.

Here it is only possible to provide the briefest possible summary of some of the basic interpretative material established by tradition: it is by no means definitive and gives only a fragmentary idea of astrological concepts.

The Planets

Sun: the living being, the physical body, psychic energy, the male principle.
Moon: the soul or psyche; fantasy and feeling, change and fluctuation (tides and months).
Mercury: intelligence, reason, movement, associative or connective function, communication (Mercury as the messenger of the Gods).
Venus: love, art, physical attraction, sentiment, sentimentality, sex.
Mars: action, energy, impulsion, aggressive function, libido (Mars as the god of war).
Jupiter: expansion, richness (material or metaphysical), health, humour, developing function.
Saturn: limitation, contraction, concentration, inhibition, separation, maturity, loss, parting (and death), saturnine temperament, restrictive function.
Uranus: suddenness, revolution, violence, transmutation (magic, alchemy, the occult arts), creative function.
Neptune: susceptibility, fantasy, romanticism, mysticism, deception and self-deception, psychic powers.
Pluto: power, demagoguery, dictators, the masses.

The Signs of the Zodiac

Aries: courage, impetuosity, energy.
Taurus: patience, persistence, obstinacy.
Gemini: progressiveness, cleverness, instability.
Cancer: inspiration, sensitivity, evasiveness.
Leo: dignity, breadth of mind, power, pretentiousness.
Virgo: reason, logic, exactitude, pedantry.
Libra: harmony, evaluation, trivialities.
Scorpio: profundity, insistence, roughness.
Sagittarius: justice, propriety, sophistry.
Capricorn: independence, abstraction, stubbornness.
Aquarius: spirituality, conviction, illusion.
Pisces: compassion, tolerance, indolence.

The Twelve Houses

1. (Ascendant) development of personality, environment, childhood, physical body and constitution.
2. Material possessions and money.
3. Family relationships, communication.
4. Parental home, hereditary characteristics.
5. Procreation, sexuality, pleasure, risks, speculation.
6. Servants, health.
7. The community, partnership, marriage, open enemies.
8. Accidents, death, inheritances, the wife's or husband's money.
9. Spiritual life, philosophy, religion, travel.
10. Vocation, profession, public life.
11. Wishes and hopes, friendships.
12. Secret enemies, seclusion (hospitals, prisons), obscure difficulties.

The Aspects

Traditionally there are 'good' and 'bad' aspects (angular relationships between two or more planets). The conjunction (0°) and opposition (180°) can be either good or bad, according to the planets concerned. A conjunction would increase the mutual influence of the planets in question. Some examples are:

Sun conj. Saturn: difficulties in connection with the development of the personality.
Moon conj. Venus: intense emotional life, artistic leanings, self-love.
Mercury conj. Mars: quick mental reactions, aggressive instincts.
Venus conj. Uranus: strong emotional tensions, unusual preoccupations.

The square (90°) and semi-square (45°) are supposed to be 'malefic', unfortunate or difficult aspects. The trine (120°) and sextile (60°) are said to be beneficent or fortunate aspects.

An Analysis

With hindsight, what can one make of Krafft's horoscope? Here there is only room for an abbreviated analysis of a few of the factors.

One might begin by examining the Sun, which is in Taurus and in the 9th House, in relation to his Virgo Ascendant. At the same time, one would look for the 'dominant' planets, those close to the Midheaven and Ascendant. It is true that Krafft was a Taurean and his Sun, high in the Midheaven, is dominant. The same also applies to Neptune and Pluto. Furthermore, one must ask how his Virgo Ascendant affected his personality.

Sun (Krafft's living being, essence) in Taurus reflects patience, persistence and obstinacy. He had the patience to embark upon vast though fruitless astro-statistical projects, and as a young man persisted in this work in spite of his father's sometimes violent objections. He was, to put it bluntly, a pig-headed person. In spite of all the negative evidence, he obstinately believed that he was destined to create a new kind of scientific astrology (which he named Cosmobiology) and, after 1937, that he could successfully exercise his strange gifts in Hitler's Germany.

Ascendant in Virgo: exactitude and pedantry. His temperament enabled him to attempt tasks that required these qualities. The dominant Neptune in Gemini in the 10th House (vocation, profession, public life) could reflect his markedly unstable character, as a result of Neptune's influence – fantasy, romanticism, mysticism and self-deception. Pluto (power) is in a strong position. Krafft hoped for both power and influence. In a strictly limited sense he achieved both for a brief time, but he died in a German concentration camp after a lengthy imprisonment. Krafft, who for years had studied his own horoscope so closely, obviously had no inkling of his fate.

Moon in Libra square to Venus in Cancer, and also square to Saturn in Capricorn, and Venus in opposition to Saturn: all may reflect Krafft's sexual complexes and unfulfilment, also his inhibitions regarding sexuality and pleasure.

Sun in the 9th House: his preoccupation with a spiritual life. Neptune in the 10th House suggests Neptunian interests, which could include astrology and the prophecies of Nostradamus, as a vocation or profession. During 1940-1 Krafft worked on the Nostradamus texts for Goebbels's Propaganda Ministry. Moon in the 2nd House: his fluctuating attitude to money and material possessions.

From these snippets one can begin to understand how a full-scale interpretation must consist of an adequate synthesis of a great many fragmentary and hypothetical propositions. In the case of Krafft one can now see how this or that would probably apply to him. An accurate blind diagnosis is far more difficult to achieve. Experience suggests that some 60% of any interpretation will appear to be correct, but the validity of the remainder can seldom be easily evaluated.

New Systems of Astrology

During this century two completely non-traditional astrological systems have been developed in Germany. The first was Alfred Witte's 'Hamburg School' of astrology with its eight hypothetical 'Trans-Neptunian' planets, for which equally hypothetical ephemerides have been published. This system still has a number of devoted supporters. Latterly some of its textbooks have been available in English in the USA.

An interesting by-product of the Hamburg School is the Ebertin system, developed by Reinhold Ebertin, who did not use the hypothetical planets. Herr Ebertin jettisoned most of the medieval astrological tradition and his system can be operated without bothering about the Houses or, for that matter, the so-called zodiacal influences. A dial apparatus is used in conjunction with the horoscope chart to identify planets and their 'mid-points' on a common 90° axis. The only aspects considered are the conjunction, opposition, square, semi-square and sesqui-quadrate. The trines and sextiles are ignored. A fair amount of simple arithmetical work is required to establish a sequence of 'planetary equations' from which a synthesis can be made with the help of Herr Ebertin's excellent manual *Combinations of Stellar Influences*, which is available in English. It would appear that this heretical system works just as well as any traditional one, and at least a lot of old-fashioned and suspect ballast has been ruthlessly thrown overboard.

Modern Scientific Research

The French statistician Michel Gauquelin decided to investigate some of the claims of astrology in 1950. Until then, there had been no really thorough attempt to apply scientific methodology to astrological data. Gauquelin analyzed the horoscopes of around 25,000 French people (it is a legal requirement in France to register the time of birth, and so he was able to construct accurate natal charts). From a sample of 576 eminent medical professionals he found that a surprising proportion were born just after Mars or Saturn had risen, or had passed the mid-heaven. He then examined another group of 508, and achieved the same correlation. He estimated that the odds against this occurring were around one million to one.

Further research into the influence of the planets on 'professional types' revealed yet another intriguing factor. He found that the position of the planets was only very significant in the charts of those people who were *positively* distinguished and successful in their field. In a group of 1458 scientists that he analyzed, whose careers could be described as no more than mundane, the position of Mars and Saturn at the time of birth did not seem to be of great significance statistically. Gauquelin and his wife Francoise continued to develop their work in this area for over thirty years.

In the US and Great Britain, similar work was initiated. Since times of birth are not registered in these countries, researchers could only look for general trends. Even so, the results proved interesting. Edmund van Deuson in the US processed 163,953 dates while, in Britain, Joe Cooper and Alan Smithers from Bradford University processed another 35,000.

Their statistics appeared to be in accord with the indications of astrological tradition that an individual's birth date will be reflected in the choice of a career. For example, the figures showed that a significant proportion of bankers are Virgos. As the sign is traditionally seen as meticulous, orderly and precise, this is in keeping with an appropriate career choice. Virgos are also said to be drawn to writing, and, again, a significant number are writers.

Other scientific studies of astrological 'leanings' have been carried out in a variety of different areas. A group of British doctors analyzed the birth signs of those patients who had been in psychiatric care over a long period of years. They were able to find correlations of certain kinds of mental illness with birth signs. Significant percentages of schizophrenics and manic depressives seem to be born early in the year.

The emotional 'profiles' attributed to subject's Sun signs would be an obvious spinoff for this kind of research. In 1977, Hans Eysenck, a very eminent British psychologist, teamed up with Jeff Mayo, a professional astrologer. Working with Eysenck's own standard personality test for extroversion and introversion, they found high correlations in the Sun-sign 'types'. Extroverts tended to belong to the odd-numbered sun signs – Aries, Gemini, Leo, Libra, Sagittarius and Aquarius – while introverts predominated in even-numbered signs – Taurus, Cancer, Virgo, Scorpio, Capricorn and Pisces.

(See also articles on individual planets and zodiac signs.)

ELLIC HOWE*

FURTHER READING: M. E. Hone, *The Modern Textbook of Astrology* (Weiser); Brian Innes, *Horoscopes* (Arco, 1978); Francis King, *The Cosmic Influence* (Aldus Books, 1976); Katharine Merlin, *Character and Fate: The Psychology of the Birth Chart*, Arkana, 1989); Derek and Julia Parker, *The New Compleat Astrologer* (Harmony Books/ Crown, 1984); John Anthony West, *The Case for Astrology*, (Viking, 1991). For the Zodiac signs and character analysis, see James Dickey, *Zodiac* (Doubleday, 1976); R. Gleadow, *The Origin of the Zodiac* (Atheneum, 1969); J. Mayo, *How to Read the Ephemeris* (Llewellyn Pubns.). See also E. Howe, *Astrology: The Story of Its Role in World War II* (Walker & Co., 1968) and L.M. Wilcox, *Astrology, Mysticism and the Occult* (Editorial Research, 1980).

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